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THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF  
ST. JOHN HANKIN









*Mr. John Hunkin 1907.*  
*Aged 37.*

# THE DRAMATIC WORKS OF ST. JOHN HANKIN

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY JOHN DRINKWATER

VOLUME  
THREE



LONDON  
MARTIN SECKER  
NUMBER FIVE JOHN STREET  
ADELPHI  
MCMXII

# NOTE

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CONTENTS OF  
VOLUME THREE

THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS	1
THE BURGLAR WHO FAILED	89
ESSAYS	117
APPENDICES	223



A

# THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS

A PLAY WITHOUT A PREFACE

*“βέλτισθ’ υγιαίνειν”*



## CHARACTERS

HUGO DE MULLIN.

JANE DE MULLIN, *his wife.*

MRS. CLOUSTON, *his sister.*

JANET DE MULLIN (*Mrs. Seagrave*), *Hugo's eldest daughter.*

JOHNNY SEAGRAVE, *her son.*

HESTER DE MULLIN, *her sister.*

BERTHA ALDENHAM.

MONTY BULSTEAD.

DR. ROLT, *the local doctor.*

MR. BROWN, *the curate.*

MISS DEANES.

ELLEN, *maid at the De Mullins'.*

*The action of the play takes place at Brendon Underwood in Dorset, Acts I and III at the Manor House, the De Mullins' house in the village, Act II on the borders of Brendon Forest. Three days pass between Acts I and II, five between Acts II and III.*



# THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS

## ACT I

SCENE.—*The Inner Hall at the Manor House in Brendon-Underwood village. An old-fashioned, white-panelled room. At the back is a big stone-mullioned Tudor window looking out on to the garden. On the left of this is a bay in which is a smaller window. A door in the bay leads out into the garden. People entering by this door pass the window before they appear. The furniture is oak, mostly Jacobean or older. The right-hand wall of the room is mainly occupied by a great Tudor fireplace, over which the De Mullin coat-of-arms is carved in stone. Above this a door leads to the outer hall and front door. A door on the opposite side of the room leads to the staircase and the rest of the house. The walls are hung with a long succession of family portraits of all periods and in all stages of dinginess as to both canvas and frame. When the curtain rises the stage is empty. Then HESTER is seen to pass the window at the back, followed by MR. BROWN. A moment later they enter. MR. BROWN is a stout, rather unwholesome-looking curate, HESTER a lean, angular girl of twenty-eight, very plainly and unattractively dressed in sombre tight-fitting*

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

*clothes. She has a cape over her shoulders and a black hat on. BROWN wears seedy clerical garments, huge boots and a squashy hat. The time is twelve o'clock in the morning of a fine day in September.*

HESTER. Come in, Mr. Brown. I'll tell mother you're here. I expect she's upstairs with father.

*[Going towards door.]*

BROWN. Don't disturb Mrs. De Mullin, please. I didn't mean to come in.

HESTER. You'll sit down now you *are* here?

BROWN. Thank you. *[Does so awkwardly.]* I'm so glad to hear Mr. De Mullin is better. The Vicar will be glad too.

HESTER. Yes. Dr. Rolt thinks he will do all right now.

BROWN. You must have been very anxious when he was first taken ill.

HESTER. We were terribly anxious.

*[HESTER takes off her hat and cape and puts them down on the window seat.]*

BROWN. I suppose there's no doubt it was some sort of stroke?

HESTER. Dr. Rolt says no doubt.

BROWN. How did it happen?

HESTER. We don't know. He had just gone out of the room when we heard a fall. Mother ran out into the hall and found him lying by the door quite unconscious. She was dreadfully frightened. So were we all.

BROWN. Had he been complaining of feeling unwell?



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

HESTER. Not specially. He complained of the heat a little. And he had a headache. But father's not strong, you know. None of the De Mullins are, Aunt Harriet says.

BROWN. Mrs. Clouston is with you now, isn't she ?

HESTER. Yes. For a month. She generally stays with us for a month in the summer.

BROWN. I suppose she's very fond of Brendon ?

HESTER. All the De Mullins are fond of Brendon, Mr. Brown.

BROWN. Naturally. You have been here so long.

HESTER. Since the time of King Stephen.

BROWN. Not in this house ?

HESTER [*smiling*]. Not in this house, of course. It's not old enough for that.

BROWN. Still, it must be very old. The oldest house in the village, isn't it ?

HESTER. Only about four hundred years. The date is 1603. The mill is older, of course.

BROWN. You still own the mill, don't you ?

HESTER. Yes. Father would never part with it. He thinks everything of the mill. We get our name from it, you know. De Mullin. Du Moulin. "Of the Mill."

BROWN. Were the original De Mullins millers then ?

HESTER [*rather shocked at such a suggestion*]. Oh no !

BROWN. I thought they couldn't have been.

HESTER. No De Mullin has ever been in trade of any kind ! But in the old days to own a mill was a feudal privilege. Only lords of manors and the great

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

abbeys had them. The farmers had to bring all their corn to them to be ground.

BROWN. I see.

HESTER. There were constant disputes about it all through the Middle Ages.

BROWN. Why was that ?

HESTER. The farmers would rather have ground their corn for themselves, I suppose.

BROWN. Why ? If the De Mullins were willing to do it for them ?

HESTER. They had to pay for having it ground, of course.

BROWN [*venturing on a small joke*]. Then the De Mullins *were* millers, after all, in a sense.

HESTER. You mustn't let father hear you say so !

BROWN. The mill is never used now, is it ?

HESTER. No. When people gave up growing corn round here and all the land was turned into pasture it fell into decay, and now it's almost ruinous.

BROWN. What a pity !

HESTER. Yes. Father says England has never been the same since the repeal of the Corn Laws. [*Enter MRS. DE MULLIN and MRS. CLOUSTON by the door on the left, followed by DR. ROLT.*] Here is mother—and Aunt Harriet.

[*MRS. DE MULLIN, poor lady, is a crushed, timid creature of fifty-eight or so, entirely dominated by the DE MULLIN fetish and quite unable to hold her own against either her husband or her sister-in-law, a hard-mouthed, resolute woman of sixty. Even HESTER she finds almost too much for her. For the rest a gentle, kindly lady, rather charming in her extreme helplessness.*

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

ROLT *is the average country doctor, brisk, sensible, neither a fool nor a genius.*]

ROLT [*as they enter the room*]. He's better. Distinctly better. A little weak and depressed, of course. That's only to be expected. Good morning. [*Shakes hands with HESTER. Nods to BROWN.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Mr. De Mullin is always nervous about himself.

ROLT. Yes. Constitutional, no doubt. But he'll pick up in a few days. Keep him as quiet as you can. That's really all he needs now.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You don't think he ought to stay in his room? . . . Good morning, Mr. Brown. Are you waiting to see me?

[BROWN *shakes hands with both ladies.*]

BROWN [*awkwardly*]. Not specially. I walked over from the church with Miss De Mullin.

HESTER. Is father coming downstairs, mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes, Hester. He insisted on getting up. You know he always hates staying in his room.

HESTER. Oh, Dr. Rolt, do you think he *should*?

ROLT. I don't think it will do him any harm. He can rest quietly in a chair or on the sofa. . . . Well, I must be off. Good-bye, Mrs. De Mullin.

[*Shakes hands briskly with every one.*]

BROWN [*rising ponderously*]. I must be going too. [*Shakes hands with MRS. DE MULLIN.*] You'll tell Mr. De Mullin I inquired after him? Good-bye, Mrs. Clouston. [*Shakes hands.*] And you're coming to help with the Harvest Decorations on Saturday, aren't you, Miss De Mullin?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

HESTER [*shaking hands*]. Of course.

[BROWN and ROLT go out.]

MRS. CLOUSTON [*seating herself and beginning to knit resolutely*]. What singularly unattractive curates the Vicar seems to get hold of, Jane!

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. Do you think so, Harriet?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Quite remarkably. This Mr. Brown, for instance. He has the most enormous feet! And his boots! I've never seen such boots!

HESTER [*flushing*]. We needn't sneer if Mr. Brown doesn't wear fine clothes, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Of course not, Hester. Still, I think he goes to the opposite extreme. And he really is quite abnormally plain. Then there was that Mr. Snood, who was curate when I was down last year. The man with the very red hands. [*These acid comments are too much for HESTER, who flounces out angrily. MRS. CLOUSTON looks up for a moment, wondering what is the meaning of this sudden disappearance. Then continues unmoved.*] I'm afraid the clergy aren't what they were in our young days, Jane.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I don't think I've noticed any falling off.

MRS. CLOUSTON. It is there all the same. I'm sure Hugo would agree with me. Of course, curates are paid next to nothing. Still, I think the Vicar might be more happy in his choice.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I believe the poor like him.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*to whom this seems of small*

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

*importance compared with his shocking social disabilities*]. Very likely. . . . Do please keep still, Jane, and don't fidget with that book. What *is* the matter with you ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I'm a little nervous this morning. Hugo's illness . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Hugo's almost well now.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still the anxiety . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Nonsense, Jane. Anxiety is not at all a thing to give way to, especially when there's no longer anything to be anxious about. Hugo's practically well now. Dr. Rolt seems to have frightened us all quite unnecessarily.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I suppose it's difficult to tell.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Of course it's difficult. Otherwise no one would send for a doctor. What are doctors for if they can't tell when a case is serious and when it is not ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. But if he didn't know ?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Then he *ought* to have known. Next time Hugo is ill you'd better send to Bridport.

[MRS. DE MULLIN *drops book on table with a clatter.*]

Really, Jane, what *are* you doing ? Throwing books about like that !

MRS. DE MULLIN. It slipped out of my hand.

[*Rises and goes up to window restlessly.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON. Is anything wrong ?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*hesitating*]. Well, the truth is I've done something, Harriet, and now I'm not sure whether I ought to have done it.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. CLOUSTON. Done what ?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*dolorously*]. I'm afraid you won't approve.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Perhaps you'd better tell me what it is. Then we shall know.

MRS. DE MULLIN. The fact is some one is coming here this morning, Harriet—to see Hugo.

MRS. CLOUSTON. To see Hugo ? Who is it ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*with horror*]. Janet ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Janet ! She wouldn't *dare* !

MRS. DE MULLIN [*dolorously*]. I sent for her, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You *sent* for her ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. When Hugo was first taken ill and Dr. Rolt seemed to think the attack was so serious. . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Dr. Rolt was a fool.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Very likely, Harriet. But he said Hugo might die. And he said if there was any one Hugo would wish to see. . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. But would Hugo wish to see Janet ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I thought he might. After all Janet *is* his daughter.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I thought he said he would never see her again ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. He did *say* that, of course. But that was eight years ago. And, of course, he wasn't ill then.

MRS. CLOUSTON. When did you send for her ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Three days ago.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why didn't she come *then*, if she was coming at all ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. She was away from home. That was so unfortunate. If she had come when Hugo was ill in bed it might have been all right. But now that he's almost well again. . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. When did you hear she was coming ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Only this morning. Here is what she says. [*Produces telegram from pocket.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON [*reads*]. "Telegram delayed. Arrive midday. Seagrave." Seagrave ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. She calls herself Mrs. Seagrave now.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*nods*]. On account of the child, I suppose.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I suppose so.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I never could understand how Janet came to go so wrong. [MRS. DE MULLIN *sighs*.] None of the *De Mullins* have ever done such a thing before.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*plaintively*]. I'm sure she doesn't get it from *my* family.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Well, she must have got it from *somewhere*. She's not in the least like a De Mullin.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*lamentably*]. I believe it was all through bicycling.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Bicycling ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. When girls usen't to scour about the country as they do now these things didn't happen.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*severely*]. I never approved of Janet's bicycling, you remember, Jane.



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Nor did I, Harriet. But it was no use. Janet only laughed. Janet never would do what she was told about things even when she was quite a child. She was so very obstinate. She was always getting some idea or other into her head. And when she did nothing would prevent her from carrying it out. At one time she wanted to *teach*.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I remember.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She said girls ought to go out and earn their own living like boys.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What nonsense !

MRS. DE MULLIN. So Hugo said. But Janet wouldn't listen. Finally we had to let her go over and teach the Aldenham girls French three times a week, just to keep her amused.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*thoughtfully*]. It was strange you never could find out who the father was.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Yes. She wouldn't tell us.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You should have made her tell you. Hugo should have insisted on it.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo did insist. He was terribly angry with her. He sent her to her room and said she was not to come down till she told us. But it was no use. Janet just stayed in her room till we had all gone to bed and then took the train to London.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You should have locked her door.

MRS. DE MULLIN. We did. She got out of the window.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Got out of the window ! The girl might have been killed.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. But Janet was always



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

fond of climbing. And she was never afraid of anything.

MRS. CLOUSTON. But there's no late train to London.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She caught the mail at Weymouth, I suppose.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Do you mean to say she *walked* all the way to Weymouth in the middle of the night? Why, it's twelve miles.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She had her bicycle, as I said.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Tck! . . . How did you know she went to London?

MRS. DE MULLIN. She wrote from there for her things.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I wonder she wasn't ashamed.

MRS. DE MULLIN. So Hugo said. However, he said I might send them. But he made me send a letter with the things to say that he would have nothing more to do with her and that she was not to write again. For a time she didn't write. Nearly five months. Then, when her baby was born, she wrote to tell me. That was how I knew she had taken the name of Seagrave. She mentioned it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Did you show the letter to Hugo?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What did he say?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Nothing. He just read it and gave it back to me without a word.

MRS. CLOUSTON. That's the last you've heard of her, I suppose?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh no, Harriet.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. CLOUSTON. Do you mean to say she goes *on* writing? And you allow her? When Hugo said she was not to?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. Yes. Not often, Harriet. Only occasionally.

MRS. CLOUSTON. She has no business to write at all.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Her letters are quite short. Sometimes I wish they were longer. They really tell one nothing about herself, though I often ask her.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You *ask* her! Then *you* write too!

MRS. DE MULLIN. I answer her letters, of course. Otherwise she wouldn't go on writing.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really, Jane, I'm surprised at you. So you've actually been corresponding with Janet all these years—and never told *me*! I think you've behaved very badly.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I didn't like to, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Didn't like to!

MRS. DE MULLIN. And as you don't think I *ought* to hear from her. . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. I don't think you ought to hear from her, of course. But as you do hear naturally I should like to have seen the letters.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I didn't know that, Harriet. In fact, I thought you would rather not. When a dreadful thing like this happens in a family it seems best not to write about it or to speak of it either, doesn't it? Hugo and I never speak of it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Does Hugo know you hear from her?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. I think not. I have never told him. Nor Hester. I'm sure Hester would disapprove.

MRS. CLOUSTON. My dear Jane, what *can* it matter whether Hester approves or not? Hester knows nothing about such things. At *her* age!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hester is twenty-eight.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Exactly. A girl like that.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Girls have such very strong opinions nowadays.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What does Janet live on? Teaching?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I suppose so. She had her Aunt Miriam's legacy, of course.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Only four hundred pounds.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. I never approved of that legacy, Jane. Girls oughtn't to have money left them. It makes them too independent.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Aunt Miriam was always so fond of Janet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Then she should have left the money to Hugo. Fathers are the proper people to leave money to.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo did have the *management* of the money—till Janet was twenty-one.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why only till she was twenty-one?

MRS. DE MULLIN. It was so in Aunt Miriam's will. Of course, Hugo would have gone on managing it for her. It was very little trouble as it was all in Consols. But Janet said she would rather look after it for herself.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Ridiculous! As if girls could possibly manage money!

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. So Hugo said. But Janet insisted. So she got her way.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What did she do with it? Spend it?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No. Put it into a railway, she said.

MRS. CLOUSTON. A railway! How dangerous!

MRS. DE MULLIN. She said she would prefer it. She said railways sometimes went up. Consols never.

MRS. CLOUSTON. She lost it all, of course?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I don't know, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You don't *know*?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No. I never liked to ask. Hugo was rather hurt about the whole thing, so the subject was never referred to.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Let me see. The child must be eight years old by now.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Just eight. It will be nine years next March since Janet went away.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What did she call him?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Johnny.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Johnny! None of the De Mullins have ever been called *Johnny*.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Perhaps it was his father's name.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Perhaps so. [Pause.]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Do you think I ought to tell Hugo about Janet's coming?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Certainly.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I thought perhaps . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Nonsense, Jane. Of course he must be told. You ought to have told him from the very beginning.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Do you mean when I sent the telegram? But Hugo was unconscious.

MRS. CLOUSTON. As soon as he recovered consciousness then.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I did mean to. But he seemed so weak, and Dr. Rolt said any excitement . . .

MRS. CLOUSTON. Dr. Rolt!

MRS. DE MULLIN [*goaded*]. Well, I couldn't tell that Dr. Rolt knew so little about Hugo's illness, could I? And I was afraid of the shock.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Still, he should have been told at once. It was the only chance.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. I see that now. But I was afraid of the shock, as I said. So I put it off. And then, when I didn't hear from Janet, I thought I would wait.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why?

MRS. DE MULLIN. You see I didn't know whether she was coming. And if she didn't come, of course there was no necessity for telling Hugo anything about it. I'm afraid he'll be very angry.

MRS. CLOUSTON. At any rate, you must tell him now. The sooner the better.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. Very well, Harriet. If you think so.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You had better go up to him at once.

[MRS. DE MULLIN *goes to the door on the left, opens it, then draws back hastily.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Here *is* Hugo. He's just coming across the hall. With Hester. How unlucky.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. CLOUSTON. I don't see that it matters.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I'd rather not have told him before Hester.

[MRS. CLOUSTON shrugs her shoulders. A moment later HUGO enters. He leans on a stick and HESTER's arm. He looks weak and pale and altogether extremely sorry for himself, obviously a nervous and a very tiresome patient.]

HESTER. Carefully, father. That's right. Will you lie on the sofa ?

DE MULLIN [*fretfully*]. No. Put me in the arm-chair. I'm tired of lying down.

HESTER. Very well. Let me help you. There. Wait a moment. I'll fetch you some pillows.

[*Props him up on pillows in an armchair.*]

DE MULLIN. Thank you.

[*Lies back exhausted and closes his eyes.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN [*going to him*]. How are you feeling now, Hugo ?

DE MULLIN. Very weak.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I wonder if you ought to have come down ?

DE MULLIN. It won't make any difference. Nothing will make any difference any more, Jane. I shan't last much longer. I'm worn out.

HESTER. Father !

DE MULLIN. Yes, Hester. Worn out [*with a sort of melancholy pride*]. None of the De Mullins have been strong. I'm the last of them. The last of the De Mullins.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. CLOUSTON. Come, Hugo, you mustn't talk in that morbid way.

DE MULLIN. I'm not morbid, Harriet. But I feel tired, tired.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You'll be better in a day or two.

DE MULLIN. No, Jane. I shall never be better. Never in *this* world. [Pause.]

MRS. DE MULLIN [*nervously*]. Hugo . . . there's something . . . something I have to tell you . . .

DE MULLIN. What is it, Jane? [*Fretfully*.] What have you been keeping from me?

MRS. DE MULLIN. I ought to have told you before. Only I didn't like . . .

DE MULLIN. Is it something about my illness?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh no, Hugo.

DE MULLIN [*relieved*]. I thought Dr. Rolt might have said something.

MRS. DE MULLIN. It's nothing of that kind.

DE MULLIN [*peevishly*]. Well, well, what is it?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo, some one is coming here to-day, to see *you*.

DE MULLIN. To see *me*? Who?

MRS. DE MULLIN. You won't be angry, Hugo?

DE MULLIN [*testily*]. How can I possibly say that, Jane, when I don't know who it is?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hugo, it's . . . [*Bell rings loudly*.] Harriet, there's the bell! I wonder if it's she? Do you think it is?

[*All look towards the door on the right expectantly.*]

DE MULLIN [*querulously*]. Well, Jane? Am I to hear who this visitor is or am I not?



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

ELLEN [*showing in a lady leading a little boy by the hand*]. Mrs. Seagrave.

[*Enter JANET and JOHNNY. JANET is a very handsome woman of six-and-thirty. She is admirably dressed, but her clothes are quiet and in excellent taste, dark in colour and plain in cut but expensive. Her hat is particularly tasteful, but also quiet. Her clothes are in marked contrast to those of her mother and sister, which are of the homeliest description and were probably made in the village. JOHNNY is a well-grown youngster of eight in a sailor suit.*]

HESTER [*shocked*]. Mother !

DE MULLIN. Janet, my dear ! [*Cry of welcome.*

JANET. Father ! [*Drops JOHNNY's hand, comes rapidly to him, falls on one knee and kisses him impulsively, patting his left hand with her right.*] How are you ? Better ? [*Holding out her left hand to her mother, but still kneeling.*] How do you do, mother dear ? [*Mrs. DE MULLIN takes it. Puts her other hand on JANET's shoulder.*] I should have come before, father, directly you sent for me. But your telegram was delayed. I was away from home.

DE MULLIN [*nods*]. I see.

JANET. Have you been very ill, father ? And did you frighten them all dreadfully ? How naughty of you !

DE MULLIN. Silly Janet ! Let me look at you, my dear. [*Looks at her face as she holds it up.*] You're not much changed, Janet.

JANET. Nor are you, father.

DE MULLIN. A little greyer, perhaps.

JANET. No ! Not a hair !



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

DE MULLIN. Well, my dear, I'm glad you've come. We parted in anger, but that's all over now. Forgotten and forgiven. Eh ?

JANET. Yes. Forgotten and forgiven. [*Rises.*] How are you, Aunt Harriet ? I didn't see you. [*Eagerly.*] Hester !

[*Goes to her impulsively, holding out her hand. HESTER takes it coldly. JANET tries to draw her towards her. HESTER resists. She drops her hand and HESTER turns away.*]

DE MULLIN. Who is that ? [*Pointing to JOHNNY.*

JANET [*turning to him*]. That is Johnny. My son.

DE MULLIN. My grandson ?

JANET. Yes. I *had* to bring him, father. We were away from home and there was no one to leave him with.

DE MULLIN. I'm glad you brought him. Come here, Johnny. Don't be afraid.

JOHNNY [*in his confident treble*]. I'm not afraid. Why should I be afraid ? [*Goes to him.*

DE MULLIN [*taking his hand*]. Say "How do you do, grandfather ?"

JOHNNY. How do you do, grandfather ?

DE MULLIN. Will you give me a kiss, Johnny ?

JOHNNY. If you like, grandfather. [*Kisses him.*

DE MULLIN. That's a good boy.

JANET. Kiss your grandmother too, Johnny.

[*MRS. DE MULLIN snatches him up and kisses him passionately. Then holds him a little way off and looks at him admiringly.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. What a fine little fellow, Janet !

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET [*proudly*]. Isn't he, mother? And *so* strong and healthy! He's hardly had a day's illness since he was born.

JOHNNY [*who has been staring at the pictures on the walls, holding his grandmother by one hand*]. Who are all these old men, grandfather?

DE MULLIN. Your ancestors, my boy.

JOHNNY. What's ancestors?

DE MULLIN. Your forefathers. Your mother's forefathers.

JOHNNY. Is that old man in the wig an ancestor?

DE MULLIN. Yes. That is Anthony De Mullin, your great-great-grandfather.

JOHNNY. What was *he*?

DE MULLIN [*puzzled*]. *What* was he? I don't know that he was anything in particular. He was just a gentleman.

JOHNNY [*disappointed*]. Is that all?

DE MULLIN. Don't make any mistake, my boy. It's a great thing to be descended from gentle-people, a thing to be proud of and to be thankful for.

JOHNNY. Mother says the great thing is for every one to be of some use in the world. Are gentle-people of more use in the world than other people, grandfather?

DE MULLIN. Certainly.

JOHNNY. And were all these old men gentle-people?

DE MULLIN. All of them. And you must grow up like them.

JOHNNY. They're very *ugly*, grandfather. [*Pause.*] What did they *do*?

DE MULLIN. They lived down here at Brendon.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JOHNNY. Nothing else ?

DE MULLIN. They looked after their land.

JOHNNY. Had they much land ?

DE MULLIN. A great deal. At one time the De Mullins owned all the land about here.

JOHNNY. How much do they own now ?

DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Not very much, I'm afraid.

JOHNNY. Then they can't have looked after it very well, can they, grandfather ?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*feeling the strain of this conversation*]. Now, Hugo, do you think you ought to talk any more ? Why not go upstairs for a little and lie down ?

DE MULLIN. Perhaps I will, Jane. I *am* a little tired.

HESTER. Shall I go with father ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No. I will. Come, Hugo.

[*Helps him up.*]

DE MULLIN. Will you come with me, Johnny ?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*hastily*]. No, Hugo. He will only disturb you. Stay down here, Johnny, with your mother. Now then. Carefully.

[*Leads DE MULLIN off by the door on the left. There is a pause, during which the remaining occupants of the room obviously have nothing in particular to say to each other. At last Mrs. Clouston speaks.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON. Well, Janet, how have you been all these years ?

JANET [*nonchalantly*]. All right, Aunt Harriet. And you ?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Pretty well, thanks.

JANET. Are you still living down at Bath ?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Yes. You live in London, Jane tells me.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. Yes.

MRS. CLOUSTON. What do you do there ? Teach ?

JANET. Oh no. Why should I be teaching ?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Jane said you wanted to teach at one time.

JANET. That was years ago. Before I left Brendon. I soon gave up that idea. No. I keep a shop.

MRS. CLOUSTON. A shop !

JANET. Yes. A hat-shop.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Good heavens ! A De Mullin in a hat-shop !

JANET [*a little maliciously*]. Not a De Mullin, Aunt Harriet. A Seagrave.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Did Mr. Seagrave keep a hat-shop ?

JANET. Mr. Seagrave ? . . . Oh, I see. No. It's not a man's hat-shop. It's a ladies'. [*Takes off hat.*] This is one of ours. What do you think of it, Hester ?

HESTER [*frostily*]. It looks very expensive.

JANET [*looking at it critically*]. Yes, I own I'm rather pleased with it.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*acidly*]. You seem to be able to dress very well altogether, in spite of the shop.

JANET [*correcting her*]. Because of it, Aunt Harriet. That's the advantage of being what is called "in trade." If I were a school teacher or a governess or something genteel of that kind I could only afford to dress like a pauper. But as I keep a shop I can dress like a lady. Clothes are a question of money, after all, aren't they ?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*contemptuously*]. If one is in a shop it doesn't matter *how* one dresses.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. On the contrary, if one is in a shop it matters a great deal. A girl in a shop *must* dress well. The business demands it. If you ever start a hat-shop, Aunt Harriet, you'll have to dress very differently. Otherwise nobody will buy your hats.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Indeed? Fortunately I've no intention of starting a shop of any kind.

JANET [*blandly*]. No? Well, I expect you're wise. I doubt if you'd make a success of it.

[*Loud ring heard off.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON [*rather flustered, gasps*]. Hester! I hope that's not a visitor. [JANET *stares*. Then *laughs good-humouredly*. AUNT HARRIET'S *nervous desire to keep her out of the way of visitors strikes her as amusing*.] What are you laughing at, Janet?

JANET [*shrugs*]. Nothing, Aunt Harriet.

ELLEN [*announces*] Miss Deanes. Mr. Brown.

[MISS DEANES *is a bulky, red-faced, short-sighted woman of forty-two, very fussy and absurd in manner, who talks very fast*. BROWN *carries a book*.]

MISS DEANES. How do you do, Mrs. Clouston? *Such a piece of news!* I felt I *must* tell you. I brought Mr. Brown with me. He was just leaving a book for you, Hester, so I made him come in.

[*Shakes hands with* HESTER.]

BROWN. Here it is, Miss De Mullin. It's the one you wanted to borrow. "Blore on the Creeds".

HESTER. Thank you.

MISS DEANES [*seeing* JANET *for first time*]. Janet! Is that you?

JANET. Yes, Miss Deanes. How are you?

[*Shakes hands.*]

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MISS DEANES. Good gracious, child, when did you come? Why, you've not been down to Brendon for years.

JANET. It is a long time, isn't it?

MISS DEANES. And who is this young gentleman?

[*Noticing JOHNNY, who is holding JANET's hand and staring at MISS DEANES.*]

JANET [*calmly*]. That is my son. Shake hands with Miss Deanes, Johnny.

MISS DEANES [*astonished*]. Your son! There now! And I never knew you were even married!

JANET [*quite at her ease*]. Didn't you?

MISS DEANES. No.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*nervously*]. I forgot. I haven't introduced you. Mr. Brown—Mrs. Seagrave.

BROWN [*bows*]. How do you do?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*turning to MISS DEANES again*]. And now what *is* your piece of news, Miss Deanes?

MISS DEANES [*volubly*]. Oh yes. I *must* tell you. You'd never guess. Somebody *else* is engaged to be married. [*To JANET.*] *Who* do you think?

JANET. I've no idea.

MISS DEANES. Bertha Aldenham—to Mr. Bulstead.

JANET [*starts*]. Mr. Bulstead?

MISS DEANES. Yes. But I forgot. *You* wouldn't know *them*. They didn't come here till long after you went away. They bought Brendon Park from the Malcolms three years ago. You remember the Malcolms, Janet?

JANET [*whose attention has wandered*]. Eh? Oh yes, of course.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Which Mr. Bulstead is it? The eldest?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MISS DEANES. Yes. Montague.

JANET [*under her breath*]. Monty Bulstead ! Engaged !

MRS. CLOUSTON. Are the Aldenhams pleased ?

MISS DEANES. Very, I expect. The Bulsteads are so rich, you see.

JANET. Does he live down here ; this Mr. Montagu Bulstead, I mean ?

MISS DEANES. Oh no. He's here on leave. He's in the Army. He only got back three months ago. [*With a little giggle.*] He and Bertha haven't taken long to settle things, have they ?

JANET. No, they haven't taken long.

MISS DEANES. But I dare say he *will* live here when he's married. As the Bulsteads are so rich. The father makes frilling and lace and so on. All those things people used to make so much better by hand. And Bertha may not care about Army life. I know I shouldn't. [*JANET smiles discreetly.*] It's not always very *nice*, is it ?

BROWN [*to JOHNNY, who has been staring at him round-eyed across the room, with heavy geniality*]. Well, young man. Who are you staring at, eh ? Do you want to talk to *me* ?

JOHNNY [*quite simply, in his high piping treble*]. No, thank you.

JANET. Sh ! Johnny ! You don't mean that. Go to Mr. Brown when he speaks to you.

JOHNNY. Very well, Mummie. [*Does so slowly.*

BROWN [*taking his hands*]. Now then, what shall we talk about, you and I ?

JOHNNY. I don't know.

BROWN. Don't you ? Suppose we see if you



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

can say your catechism then? Would you like *that*?

JOHNNY. What's catechism?

BROWN. Come, Johnny, I'm sure your mother has taught you your catechism. Can you repeat your "Duty towards your Neighbour"? [JOHNNY *shakes his head emphatically*.] Try—"My duty towards my neighbour . . ."

JOHNNY. Mother says it's every one's duty to be healthy and to be happy. Is that what you mean?

BROWN [*scandalised*]. No! No!

JOHNNY. Well, that's what mother taught me.

JANET [*coming to the rescue*]. I'm afraid he doesn't know his catechism yet, Mr. Brown. You see, he's only eight. [BROWN *bows stiffly*.] Run away, Johnny, and play in the garden for a little.

[*Leads him to the door in the bay.*]

JOHNNY. All right, Mummie.

[JOHNNY *runs out into the garden*. *A certain relief is perceptible on his departure. It is felt that his interview with MR. BROWN has not been a success.*]

MISS DEANES [*who feels that a change of subject will be only tactful*]. There now, Hester! I do believe you've never asked after Dicky! He'll be *so* offended!

HESTER [*smiling*]. Has Dicky been ill again? I thought you said he was better yesterday.

MISS DEANES. He was. But he had a relapse, poor *darling*. I had to sit up all last night with him!

JANET. What has been the matter with him?

MISS DEANES. Some sort of chill, Dr. Rolt said. I was *dreadfully* anxious.



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. What a pity! Colds are such troublesome things for children.

MISS DEANES [*puzzled*]. Children?

JANET. Yes. You were speaking of a child, weren't you?

MISS DEANES. Oh no. Dicky is my *cockatoo*. He's the *sweetest* bird. Talks quite like a human being. And never a coarse expression. That's so unusual with cockatoos.

JANET. Indeed?

MISS DEANES. Yes. The voyage, you see. They come all the way from South America, and generally they pick up the most dreadful language, poor lambs—from the sailors. But Dicky didn't. He has such a pure mind. [*Rising.*] And now I really must be going. I have all kinds of people I want to tell about Mr. Bulstead's engagement.

[*Shaking hands with* MRS. CLOUSTON *and* JANET.

BROWN. I must be off too. Wait one moment, Miss Deanes. Good-bye, Mrs. Clouston. [*Shakes hands with* MRS. CLOUSTON *and bows stiffly to* JANET. *He has not yet forgiven* JOHNNY *for not knowing his catechism. To* HESTER.] Good-bye, Miss De Mullin. Shall I see you at Evensong?

[*Shakes hands with* HESTER.

HESTER. I expect so.

[BROWN *and* MISS DEANES *go out.*]

JANET. Poof!

MRS. CLOUSTON. Janet!

JANET. What a fool Miss Deanes is!

MRS. CLOUSTON [*indifferently*]. She always was, wasn't she?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. I suppose so. Going on in that way about a ridiculous cockatoo ! And that *hideous* little curate !

HESTER. I don't see why you should sneer at all my friends.

JANET. Are they your friends, Hester ? Then I won't sneer at them. But you can't call Mr. Brown *handsome*, can you ?

HESTER. Mr. Brown is a very good man and works very hard among the poor. That's better than being handsome.

JANET. Yes. But less agreeable, isn't it ? However, if *you* like him there's an end of it. But he needn't have begun asking Johnny his catechism the very first time he met him. *I* don't call it good manners.

HESTER. How was he to know the poor child was being brought up to be a little heathen ?

[*Takes up her hat and cape and begins putting them on.*]

JANET [*sbrugs*]. How, indeed !

MRS. CLOUSTON. Are you going out, Hester ? Lunch will be ready in half an hour.

HESTER. Only to take Mrs. Wason her soup, Aunt Harriet.

JANET [*looking curiously at HESTER*]. Do you want to marry Mr. Brown, Hester ?

MRS. CLOUSTON. My dear Janet !

JANET. Well, Aunt Harriet, there's nothing to be ashamed of if she does. Do you, Hester ?

HESTER. Why do you ask such a question ?

JANET. Never mind. Only answer it. [*Pause.*]  
You do like him, don't you ?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

HESTER. I've a great respect for Mr. Brown.

JANET. Don't blush, my dear. I dare say that's much the same thing.

HESTER. I won't talk to you about it. You only sneer.

JANET. I wasn't sneering. Come, Hester, don't be cross. Why shouldn't we be friends? I might help you.

HESTER. How could *you* help me?

JANET [*looking quizzically at poor HESTER's head-gear*]. I might make you a hat, my dear.

HESTER. Mr. Brown doesn't notice those things.

JANET. All men notice those things, Hester.

HESTER [*with a sneer*]. I suppose that's why *you* wear such fine clothes.

JANET [*quite good-humoured*]. That's it. Fine feathers make fine birds.

HESTER. Well, *I* call it shameless.

JANET. My dear Hester, you're always being ashamed of things. You always were, I remember. What is there to be ashamed of in that? What on earth were women given pretty faces and pretty figures for if not to make men admire them and want to marry them?

HESTER [*acidly*]. Well, *your* plan hasn't been very successful so far, anyhow!

JANET [*quietly*]. Nor has yours, Hester.

[*HESTER makes exclamation of impatience and seems about to reply angrily. Then thinks better of it and goes out without a word. JANET follows her retreat with her eyes and smiles half cynically, half compassionately. The Curtain falls.*]

## ACT II

SCENE.—*On the edge of Brendon Forest. Time, three days later. A road runs along the back of the stage, from which it is separated by a fence and high hedge. In this but somewhat to the right is a stile and also a gate. Round the trunk of a large tree to the left is a rough wooden seat. The stage is empty when the curtain rises. Then enter MRS. DE MULLIN, JANET and JOHNNY. They approach stile from the left and come through gate. There is an exit on the right of the stage through the Forest.*

JANET. I don't think I'll come any farther, mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You won't come up to the house ?

JANET. No, thanks. [*Rather grimly.*] I don't want to see Mrs. Bulstead. And I'm sure Mrs. Bulstead doesn't want to see me.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I wish Hester could have come.

JANET. Why couldn't she ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. She's at the church putting up the decorations. It's the Harvest Thanksgiving to-morrow.

JANET [*laughing*]. Mr. Brown !

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, I told you you weren't to laugh at Hester about Mr. Brown. It's not kind.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET [*lightly*]. It's all right, mother. Hester's not here.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, I don't like it, dear. It's not quite . . .

JANET [*soothing her*]. Not quite *nice*. I know, mother. Not the way really refined and ladylike young women talk. But I'm only quite a common person who sells hats. You can't expect all these refinements from *me* !

[*Mrs. De Mullin sighs.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Are you going to turn back ?

JANET. Not at once. I'll wait for you here a little with Johnny, in case they're out. Why, they've put a seat here.

[*She sits on the side farthest from the road.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Usen't there to be one ?

JANET. No. Nor a gate in my time. Only a stile.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Very likely, dear. I don't remember. I don't often come this way.

JANET [*nods*]. I often used to come along it in the old days.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I dare say. Well, I must be getting on to my call or I shall be late. You're sure you won't come ?

JANET. Quite, mother. Good-bye.

[*Mrs. De Mullin goes off through the forest.*] "

JOHNNY. Where's grandmother going, Mummie ?

JANET. Up to the big house.

JOHNNY. What big house ?

JANET. Brendon Park.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JOHNNY. Mayn't I go up to the big house too ?

JANET. No, dear. You're to stay with mother.

JOHNNY. Who lives at the big house ?

JANET. Nobody you know, dear.

JOHNNY. That's why I asked, Mummie.

JANET. Well, don't ask any more, sonny. Mother's rather tired. Run away and play, there's a good boy. *[Kisses him.]*

JOHNNY. Very well, Mummie.

*[JOHNNY disappears into the wood. JANET falls into a brown study. Presently a footstep is heard coming along the road, but she seems to notice nothing. Then a young man climbs over the stile. He starts as he sees her and draws back, then advances eagerly, holding out his hand.]*

JANET. Monty !

MONTY. Janet ! Is that you ?

JANET *[smiling]*. Yes, Monty.

MONTY *[astonished]*. Janet ! Here !

JANET. Yes, Monty.

MONTY *[nodding over his shoulder]*. Our stile, Janet !

JANET. Our stile.

MONTY *[nods]*. The stile where you and I first met.

JANET *[relapsing for a moment into something like sentiment]*. Yes. I thought I must see it again—for the sake of old times.

MONTY. How long ago it all seems !

JANET *[matter-of-fact]*. It *is* a longish time, you know.

MONTY *[thoughtfully]*. I believe that was the happiest month of my life, Janet.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. Was it, Monty ?

MONTY. Yes. [*Pause.*] I say, when did you come down ? You don't *live* at home any longer, do you ?

JANET. No. I only came down three days ago.

MONTY. By Jove, it *is* good to see you again ! Why, it's eight years since we used to be together, you and I.

JANET. Nearly nine.

MONTY. Yes. . . . You're not coming to live down here again, are you ?

JANET. No. Why ?

MONTY. I thought perhaps . . .

JANET [*cynically*]. Would you dislike it very much if I did, Monty ?

MONTY. Of course not.

JANET. Confess. You *did* feel it would be rather awkward ?

MONTY. Well, of course . . .

JANET. However, you can set your mind at rest. I'm not.

[*His relief at this intelligence enables him to realise the pleasure he is getting from seeing her again.*]

MONTY. I say, Janet, how well you're looking ! I believe you're handsomer than ever.

JANET [*smiling*]. Am I ?

MONTY. You know you are.

[*Pause. He looks at her admiringly. She turns away with a little smile.*]

JANET [*feeling that they are getting on to dangerous ground*]. Well, Monty. Where have you been these eight years ?



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MONTY. Abroad with my regiment. We've been ordered all over the place. I've been home on leave, of course. But not for the last three years. Not since father bought the Park. I've never been at Brendon since . . . [Pause.]

JANET. Since *we* were here? Don't blush, Monty. [He nods shamefacedly.] How did he come to buy the place?

MONTY. It was just a chance. He saw it advertised, came and looked at it and bought it. He's no idea I was ever at Brendon before. [Rather bitter laugh.] None of them have. I have to pretend not to know my way about.

JANET. Why?

MONTY. It seems safer. [JANET nods.] Sometimes I almost forget to keep it up. I'm such a duffer about things. But I've managed hitherto. And now, of course, it's all right, as I've been here three months. I may be supposed to know the beastly place by this time.

JANET. Beastly? You're not very polite.

[MONTY laughs shamefacedly.]

MONTY. You got my note, didn't you?

JANET. What note? . . . Oh, eight years ago, you mean? Yes.

MONTY. I left it with the woman at the lodgings. As you were coming over that afternoon, I thought it safer than sending a message. And of course I daren't telegraph. [JANET nods.] I was awfully sick at having to go away like that. All in a moment. Without even saying good-bye. But I had to.

JANET. Of course. Was your mother badly hurt?



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MONTY. No. Only stunned. That was such rot. If people get chucked out of a carriage they must expect to get stunned. But of course they couldn't know. The telegram just said "Mother hurt. Carriage accident. Come at once." It got to me at the lodgings a couple of hours before you were coming. I had just time to chuck my things into a bag and catch the train. I wanted to come back after the mater was all right again. But I couldn't very well, could I ?

JANET. Why not ?

MONTY. Well, the regiment was to sail in less than three weeks, and the mater would have thought it rather rough if I'd gone away again. I'd been away six weeks as it was.

JANET. Oh yes. Of course.

MONTY [*with half a sigh*]. To think if I hadn't happened to be riding along that road and seen you at the stile and asked my way, you and I might never have met. What a chance life is !

JANET [*nods*]. Just a chance. [*Pause.*]

MONTY. Why did you go away, Janet ? You weren't going the last time I saw you.

JANET. Wasn't I ?

MONTY. No. At least you said nothing about it.

JANET. I didn't know I was going then. Not for certain.

MONTY. Why *did* you go ?

JANET [*quietly*]. I had to, Monty.

MONTY [*puzzled*]. You had to ? [JANET *nods*.]  
But why ?

JANET. Mother found out.

MONTY. About us ?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. Yes. And she told father.

MONTY [*genuinely distressed*]. Oh, Janet, I'm so sorry!

JANET [*sbrugs*]. It couldn't be helped.

MONTY. Does he know who it was?

JANET. Who *you* were? No.

MONTY. You didn't tell him?

JANET. Monty! As if I should.

MONTY. I don't know. Girls generally do.

JANET. I didn't.

MONTY. No. I suppose you wouldn't. But you're different from most girls. Do you know there was always something rather splendid about you, Janet?

JANET [*curtseys*]. Thank you.

MONTY. I wonder he didn't *make* you tell.

JANET. He did try, of course. That was why I ran away.

MONTY. I see. Where did you go to?

JANET. London.

MONTY. To London? All alone? [JANET *nods*.]  
Why did you do that? And why didn't you let me know?

JANET [*sbrugs*]. You were out of England by that time.

MONTY. But why London?

JANET. I had to go somewhere. And it seemed better to go where I shouldn't be known. Besides it's easier to be lost sight of in a crowd.

MONTY. But what did you do when you got there?

JANET [*calmly*]. I got a place in a shop, Monty.

MONTY. A shop? You!

JANET. Yes, a hat-shop, in Regent Street. My

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

dear Monty, don't gape like that. Hat-shops are perfectly respectable places. Almost too respectable to judge by the fuss two of them made about employing *me*.

MONTY. What do you mean ?

JANET. Well, when I applied to them for work they naturally asked if I had ever worked in a hat-shop before. And when I said "No," they naturally asked why I wanted to begin. In the innocence of my heart I told them. Whereupon they at once refused to employ me—not in the politest terms.

MONTY. Poor Janet. What beastly luck ! Still  
[*Hesitates.*]

JANET. Yes, Monty.

MONTY. I mean, naturally they couldn't be expected . . .

JANET. Monty !

MONTY [*flustered*]. At least I don't mean that exactly. Only . . . [Stops.]

JANET. My dear Monty, I quite understand what you mean. You needn't trouble to be explicit. Naturally they couldn't be expected to employ an abandoned person like me to trim hats. That was exactly their view.

MONTY. But I thought you said you *did* get a place in a shop ?

JANET. Yes. But not at either of *those* shops. They were *far* too virtuous.

MONTY. How did you do it ?

JANET. Told lies, Monty. I believe that's how most women get employment.

MONTY. Told lies ?

JANET. Yes. I invented a husband, recently

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

deceased, bought several yards of crape and a wedding ring. This is the ring. [*Takes off glove.*

MONTY. Oh, Janet, how beastly for you !

[*JANET shrugs.*]

JANET [*laughing*]. Everything seems to be "beastly" to you, Monty. Brendon and telling lies and lots of other things. Luckily I'm less superfine.

MONTY. Didn't they find out ?

JANET. No. That was why I decided to be a widow. It made inquiries more difficult.

MONTY. I should have thought it made them easier.

JANET. On the contrary. You can't cross-question a widow about a recent bereavement. If you do she cries. I always used to look tearful directly my husband's name was even mentioned. So they gave up mentioning it. Women are so boring when they will cry.

MONTY. They might have inquired from other people.

JANET. Why should they ? Besides there was no one to inquire from. I called him Seagrave—and drowned him at sea. You can't ask questions of the sharks.

MONTY. Oh, Janet, how can you joke about it ?

JANET. I couldn't—then. I wanted work too badly. But I can now—with your kind permission, I mean.

MONTY. And you've been at the shop ever since ?

JANET. Not *that* shop. I was only there about six months—till baby was born, in fact . . .

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MONTY [*horrified*]. Janet, there was a baby !

JANET. Of course there was a baby.

MONTY. Oh, Janet ! And you never wrote !  
Why didn't you write ?

JANET. I did think of it. But on the whole I thought I wouldn't. It would have been no good.

MONTY. No good ?

JANET. Not then. You were in India. I was in England.

MONTY. You ought to have written at once—directly your mother found out.

JANET. One week after you sailed, Monty ?  
[*Defiantly*]. Besides, why should I write ?

MONTY. Why ? I could have married you, of course.

JANET. If I'd asked you, you mean ? Thank you, my dear Monty.

MONTY. No, I don't. Of course I should have married you. I *must* have married you.

JANET [*looking at him thoughtfully*]. I wonder if you would.

MONTY. Certainly I should. I should have been bound in honour.

JANET. I see. Then I'm glad I never wrote.

MONTY. You're *glad* ? Now ?

JANET. Yes. I've done some foolish things in my life, Monty, but none quite so foolish as that. To marry a schoolboy, not because he loves you or wants to marry you, but because he thinks he's "bound in honour." No, thank you.

MONTY. I don't mean that. You know I don't, Janet. I loved you, of course. That goes without saying. I'd have married you like a shot before, only

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

the Governor would have made such a fuss. The Governor was so awfully strait-laced about this sort of thing. When I was sent away from Eton he made the most ghastly fuss.

JANET. Were you sent away from Eton for "this sort of thing"?

MONTY. Yes—at least I don't mean that either. But it was about a girl there. He was frightfully wild. He threatened to cut me off if I ever did such a thing again. Such rot! As if no one had ever been sent away from school before!

JANET [*reflectively*]. I didn't know you'd been sent away from Eton.

MONTY. Didn't you? I suppose I didn't like to tell you—for fear of what you'd think [*bitterly*.] I seem to have been afraid of everything in those days.

JANET. Not *everything*, Monty.

MONTY. Oh, you know what I mean. I was awfully afraid of the Governor, I remember. I suppose all boys are if their parents rag them too much. But I would have married you, Janet, if I'd known. I would honestly.

JANET [*blandly*]. What is the pay of a British subaltern, Monty?

MONTY. The Governor would have had to stump up, of course.

JANET. Poor Mr. Bulstead! He'd have *liked* that, I suppose? And what about your poor unhappy colonel? And all the other little subalterns?

MONTY [*obstinately*]. Still, you ought to have written.

JANET [*quietly*]. *You* never wrote.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MONTY. I couldn't. You know that. You never would let me. That was why I couldn't send that note to you to tell you I was going away. You said my letters would be noticed.

JANET. Yes. I forgot that. That's the result of having a father who is what is called old-fashioned.

MONTY. What do you mean?

JANET. All letters to the Manor House are delivered locked in a bag. They always have been since the Flood, I believe, or at least since the invention of the postal service. And of course father won't have it altered. So every morning there's the ritual of unlocking this absurd bag. No one is allowed to do that but father—unless he is ill. Then mother has the privilege. And of course he scrutinises the outside of every letter and directly it's opened asks who it's from and what's inside it. Your letters would have been noticed at once.

MONTY. How beastly!

JANET. The penalty of having nothing to do, Monty.

MONTY. I know. What a mess the whole thing is!

JANET. Just so. No. There was no way out of it except the hat-shop.

MONTY [*remorsefully*]. It's awfully rough on you, Janet.

JANET. Never mind. I dare say I wasn't cut out for the wife of a subaltern, Monty; whereas I make excellent hats.

MONTY [*savagely*]. You're still making the d——d things?

JANET. Yes. Only at another shop. The Regent



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

Street place had no room for me when I was well enough to go back to work. But the woman who kept it gave me a recommendation to a friend who was starting in Hanover Street. A most superior quarter for a hat-shop, Monty. In fact *the* superior quarter. Claude et Cie was the name.

MONTY [*rather shocked*]. A *French* shop ?

JANET. No more French than you are, Monty. It was kept by a Miss Hicks, one of the most thoroughly British people you can possibly imagine. But we called ourselves Claude et Cie in order to be able to charge people more for their hats. You can always charge fashionable women more for their clothes if you pretend to be French. It's one of the imbecilities of commerce. So poor dear Miss Hicks became Madame Claude and none of our hats cost less than seven guineas.

MONTY. Do people buy hats at such a price ?

JANET. Oh yes. Everybody in Society bought them. Claude et Cie was quite the rage that season. Nobody who was anybody went anywhere else.

MONTY. She must have made a great deal of money.

JANET. On the contrary. She made nothing at all and narrowly escaped bankruptcy.

MONTY. But I don't understand. If her hats were so dear and everybody bought them ?

JANET. Everybody *bought* them but nobody *paid* for them. In the highest social circles, I believe, people never do pay for anything—certainly not for their clothes. At least, nobody paid Miss Hicks, and at the end of six months she owed £1200 and hadn't a penny to pay her rent.



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MONTY. Why didn't she *make* them pay ?

JANET. She did dun them, of course, but they only ordered more hats to keep her quiet, which didn't help Miss Hicks much. And when she went on dunning them they said they should withdraw their custom. In fact, she was in a dilemma. If she let the bills run on she couldn't pay her rent. And if she asked her customers to pay their bills they ceased to be customers.

MONTY. How beastly !

JANET. Not again, Monty !

MONTY. What *did* she do ?

JANET. She didn't do anything. She was too depressed. She used to sit in the back room where the hats were trimmed and weep over the materials, regardless of expense. Finally things came to a crisis. The landlord threatened to distrain for his rent. But just as it looked as if it was all over with Claude et Cie a capitalist came to the rescue. *I* was the capitalist.

MONTY. You ?

JANET. Yes. I'd an old aunt once who was fond of me and left me a legacy when I was seventeen. Four hundred pounds.

MONTY. That wouldn't go very far.

JANET. Four hundred pounds goes a longish way towards setting up a shop. Besides, it was nearly five hundred by that time. My shares had gone up. Well, I and my five hundred pounds came to the rescue. I paid the rent and the most clamorous of the creditors, and Miss Hicks and I became partners.

MONTY. But what was the good of that if the business was worth nothing ?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. It was worth several hundred pounds to any one who had the pluck to sue half the British aristocracy. I sued them. It was tremendous fun. They were simply furious. They talked as if they'd never been sued before! As for Miss Hicks she wept more than ever and said I'd ruined the business.

MONTY. Hadn't you?

JANET. That business. Yes. But with the £1200—or as much of it as we could recover—we started a new one. A cheap hat-shop. Relatively cheap that is—for Hanover Street. We charged two guineas a hat instead of seven, 100 per cent. profit instead of . . . You can work it out for yourself. But then our terms were strictly cash, so we made no bad debts. That was my idea.

MONTY. But you said nobody ever paid for their hats.

JANET. Not in the highest social circles. But we drew our customers from the middle classes who live in South Kensington and Bayswater, and are not too haughty to pay for a hat if they see a cheap one.

MONTY. But wasn't it a frightful risk?

JANET [*cheerfully*]. It was a risk, of course. But everything in life is a risk, isn't it? And it succeeded, as I felt sure it would. We're quite a prosperous concern nowadays, and I go over to Paris four times a year to see the latest fashions. That, my dear Monty, is the history of Claude et Cie.

[*Pause.*]

MONTY. And you've never married, Janet?

JANET. No.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MONTY [*hesitates*]. Janet . . . is it because . . . ?

JANET. Because ?

MONTY. Because you still care for *me* ?

JANET. Monty, don't be vain.

MONTY [*repelled*]. I didn't mean it like that. Janet, don't laugh. Of course, I'm glad if you don't care any more. At least, I suppose I ought to be glad. It would have been dreadful if you had gone on caring all these years and I not known. But did you ?

JANET. No, Monty. You may set your mind at rest. I didn't.

MONTY. You're sure ?

JANET. Quite. I had too many other things to think of.

MONTY. Do you mean that beastly shop ?

JANET [*quietly*]. I meant my baby.

MONTY. *Our* baby. Is it alive ?

JANET. Of course. What do you mean, Monty ?

MONTY. I thought, as you didn't say . . . [*Thoughtfully*]. Poor little beast ! [JANET *makes gesture of protest*]. Well, it's rough luck on the little beggar, isn't it ? What's become of him, Janet ?

JANET. What's *become* of him ? My dear Monty, what should have become of him ? He's quite alive, as I said, and particularly thriving.

MONTY. Do you mean he's *living* with you ? . . . But, of course, I forgot, you're supposed to be married.

JANET [*correcting him*]. A widow, Monty. An inconsolable widow !

MONTY. Where is he ? In London ?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. No. As a matter of fact he's probably not fifty yards away. Over there.

[*Points toward the wood.*]

MONTY [*jumping up*]. Janet!

[*Nervously looking round.*]

JANET [*rallying him*]. Frightened, Monty?

MONTY. Of course not. [*Shamefacedly.*]

JANET. Just a little?

MONTY [*regaining courage*]. Janet, let me see him.

JANET [*amused*]. Would you like to?

MONTY. Of course, I should. He's *my* baby as well as yours, if it comes to that. Do call him, Janet.

JANET. All right. [*Calls.*] Johnny! [*Pause.*] John—ny! [*To MONTY.*] You mustn't tell him, you know.

MONTY. Of course not.

JOHNNY [*off*]. Yes, Mummie.

JANET. Come here for a minute. Mother wants to speak to you.

JOHNNY [*off*]. Very well, Mummie. [*Enters.*] Oh, Mummie, I've found such a lot of rabbits. You must come and see them. [*Seeing MONTY for the first time, stares at him.*] Oh!

MONTY. Come here, youngster. Come and let me look at you. [*JOHNNY goes to him slowly.*]

MONTY, *grasping both hands, draws him to him, looking at him long and keenly.*] He's like you, Janet.

JANET. Is he?

MONTY. Yes. He has your eyes. So your name's Johnny, young man?

JOHNNY. Yes.

MONTY. Well, Johnny, will you give me a kiss? [*MONTY leans forward. He does so.*] That's right.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JOHNNY. And now, Mummie, come and look at my rabbits.

JANET. Not yet, dear. Mother's busy just now.

JOHNNY. May I go back to them, then ?

JANET. Yes.

MONTY. Suppose I won't let you go ?

JOHNNY. I'll make you—and so will Mummie.

MONTY. Plucky little chap. Off with you.

[*Kisses him again, then releases his hands.* JOHNNY *trots off again.* MONTY *follows him with his eyes.* *Pause.*]

JANET. Well, Monty, what do you think of him ?

MONTY [*enthusiastic*]. I think he's *splendid*.

JANET [*proudly*]. Isn't he ? And such a sturdy little boy. He weighed ten pounds before he was a month old.

MONTY [*shyly*]. I say, Janet.

JANET. Yes ?

MONTY [*hesitates*]. You'll let me kiss you once more, won't you ? For the last time ? . . . [*She hesitates.*] You don't mind ?

JANET [*heartily*]. Of course, not, Monty. You're not *married* yet, you know.

MONTY. Janet ! My dear, dear Janet !

[*Seizes her and kisses her fiercely.*]

JANET [*releasing herself gently*]. That's enough, Monty.

MONTY [*remorsefully*]. I'm afraid I behaved like an awful brute to you, Janet.

JANET [*lightly*]. Oh, no.

MONTY. Yes, I did. I ought to have married you. I ought to marry you still. On account of the boy.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET [*quite matter-of-fact*]. Oh, well, you can't do that now in any case, can you—as you're engaged to Bertha Aldenham?

MONTY. You've heard about that? Who told you?

JANET. A worthy lady called Miss Deanes.

MONTY. I know. A regular sickener.

JANET. My dear Monty!

MONTY. Sorry.

JANET. She brought the good news. The very day I arrived as it happened. We've hardly talked of anything else at the Manor House since—except father's illness, of course.

MONTY. Why?

JANET. What else is there to talk about—in Brendon?

MONTY. That's true. Isn't it . . . [*Stops himself, looks at watch. Whistles.*] Whew! [*Rises.*

JANET. What is it, Monty?

MONTY. I say, Janet, I wonder if you'd mind going now?

JANET. Why? [*She rises too.*

MONTY [*awkwardly*]. Well, the fact is I'm expecting some one here directly. I . . .

JANET. Bertha?

MONTY. Yes. I was to meet her here at the stile at six.

JANET. Our stile, Monty?

MONTY. Yes. . . . You don't mind, do you—about my asking you to go, I mean?

JANET [*sitting again*]. Not in the least.

MONTY. But you're not going?

JANET. Why should I go?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MONTY. Oh, well, I thought . . .

JANET. That it wouldn't be quite suitable for us to meet ?

MONTY. I didn't mean that, of course. But I thought you mightn't like—I mean it might be painful . . . *[Sits again.]*

JANET. For me to see her ? On the contrary, I'm dying to see her.

MONTY. Janet, sometimes I think you're not quite human.

JANET. My dear boy, I'm extremely human—and therefore curious. *[Pause.]* What's she like, Monty ? Now, I mean. She promised to be pretty.

MONTY. She is pretty, I suppose. *[Pause.]* I wonder if Bertha and I will ever have a son like Johnny !

JANET. Let's hope so, Monty. For Bertha's sake.

MONTY. Isn't that some one coming ? *[Pause, listens.]* I expect it's she. *[Rising hastily and advancing towards stile.]* Is that you, Bertha ?

BERTHA *[at stile]*. Oh ! There you are. Yes. Isn't it hot ? *[Entering the gate which he opens for her.]* Am I punctual ? *[With a cry.]* Janet ! When did you come home ? *[Goes to her eagerly.]*

JANET *[shaking hands]*. Only three days ago.

*[BERTHA kisses her.]*

BERTHA. Only three days ! And you've never been up to see us.

JANET. I know. But with father ill . . .

BERTHA. Of course. I understand. I was only joking. How is Mr. De Mullin ?



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. Much better. Not well yet, of course. But he gets stronger every day.

BERTHA. I'm so glad. I say, Janet, do you remember when you used to teach us French ?

JANET. Yes.

BERTHA. I was awfully troublesome, I remember.

MONTY. I expect you were an awful duffer at it, too, Bertha.

BERTHA. What check !

MONTY. Wasn't she, Ja—*[pulls himself up]*—Miss De Mullin ?

*[JANET smiles nervously.]*

BERTHA. I didn't know you'd met Janet, Monty ?

MONTY. Oh, yes.

BERTHA. Why didn't you tell us ?

*[Quite unsuspecting of anything wrong. Merely curious.]*

MONTY. It was some time ago.

BERTHA *[surprised]*. Not at Brendon ? You've never been at Brendon before.

MONTY. No. It was at Weymouth. I was there getting over typhoid years ago.

BERTHA. I remember, you told me. Eight or nine years ago, wasn't it ?

MONTY. Yes. *[Looks at watch.]* I say, Bertha, we must be off if we're not to be late.

BERTHA. Give me two minutes to rest. The weather's simply stifling.

MONTY. Rot ! It's quite cool.

BERTHA. Then you must have been sitting here a long time. I've been walking along a dusty road and I'm not going to start yet. Besides I want to



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

know all about you two meeting. Were you staying at Weymouth, Janet ?

JANET. Oh, no. I just bicycled over. Mr. Bulstead ran into me.

MONTY. I like that. She ran into *me*.

JANET. Anyhow my front wheel buckled and he had to help me to put it right.

BERTHA. What gallantry !

MONTY. It was. The beastly thing took about half an hour. By the time it was over we seemed to have known each other for a lifetime. [*Looks at watch.*] Two minutes is up. Time to start, Bertha.

BERTHA. It isn't.

MONTY. It is. You'll be late for dressing to a certainty if you don't go.

BERTHA. I like that. I can dress as quickly as you if it comes to that.

MONTY. Oh, no. I can dress in ten minutes. I'll give you a quarter of an hour's start and be down in the drawing-room five minutes before you're ready. Is it a bet ?

BERTHA. Done. In sixpences. [*To JANET.*] I'm staying at the Park for a few days longer, Janet. Come up and see me, won't you ?

JANET [*uncomfortably*]. I'm afraid I can't promise. On account of father.

BERTHA. Well, after I've gone home then. Mother will want to see you. And so will Helen. And now, I suppose, I really must go. Come along, Monty.

MONTY. Not I. I needn't go for a quarter of an hour. You have a quarter of an hour's start.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

BERTHA. All right. Good-bye, Janet. [*Kisses her.*] You won't forget about coming as soon as you can? I go back home on Thursday.

JANET. I won't forget.

[*BERTHA goes off through the wood. JANET watches her go, and there is a pause.*]

Yes, she *is* pretty, Monty. Very pretty.

MONTY [*nods.*] You don't mind?

JANET. Her being pretty? Of course not. It's a justification.

MONTY. A justification?

JANET. For forgetting me.

MONTY [*impulsively, seizing her hands.*] Janet, I've never done that. You know I haven't.

JANET [*drawing back.*] No, Monty. Not again. [*Pause.*]

MONTY. I say, I as nearly as possible called you Janet right out before Bertha.

JANET. So I saw. You *did* call me Miss De Mullin, by the way—which wasn't very clever of you.

MONTY. Did I? What an ass I am! But I don't suppose she noticed.

JANET. I dare say not. [*A shrill cry comes from the wood on the right. Then silence. JANET starts up.*] What was that?

MONTY. I don't know.

JANET. It sounded like a child. Where did it come from? Over here, didn't it?

MONTY. I think so.

JANET [*alarmed*]. I hope Johnny . . . I must go and see. . . .

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

[*A moment later JOHNNY runs in sobbing, followed by MRS. DE MULLIN and BERTHA.*]

Johnny! What is it, my sweetheart? [*Runs to him.*]

JOHNNY. Oh, Mummie, Mummie, I was running after the rabbits and I tripped over some nettles and they stung me.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He put his foot in a hole, Janet. He fell just as I met Bertha. [*Shakes hands with MONTY.*] How do you do, Mr. Bulstead?

JANET. There! There! my pet. Did it hurt very much? Mother shall kiss it and make it well. [*Does so.*]

JOHNNY [*sobs*]. Oh-h-h——

BERTHA. Is he your son?

JANET. Yes. Don't cry any more, dear. Brave boys don't cry, you know.

JOHNNY [*gasps*]. It h-hurts so.

JANET. I know. But crying won't make it hurt less, will it? So you must dry your eyes. Come now.

JOHNNY. All right, Mummie. [*Still sobs gradually.*]

BERTHA [*astonished*]. I'd no idea you were married, Janet.

JANET. Hadn't you?

BERTHA. No. When was it?

JANET. Eight years ago. Nearly nine. To Mr. Seagrave.

BERTHA. Is he down here with you?

JANET. No. My husband died soon after our marriage.

BERTHA. Poor Janet. I'm so sorry. [*Pause.*] And it was before your marriage that Monty met you?

JANET. How do you know?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

BERTHA [*quite unsuspecting*]. He called you Miss De Mullin.

JANET. Of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*pricking up her ears suspiciously at this*]. I didn't know you had met my daughter before, Mr. Bulstead.

BERTHA. Nor did I. They met down at Weymouth quite by chance eight or nine years ago.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*gravely*]. Indeed?

MONTY. Yes. . . . I say, Bertha, excuse my interrupting you, but we really must be off now if we're not to be late.

BERTHA. You want to win that bet!

MONTY. The bet's off. There's no time to give you any start. I must come, too, or I shan't be in time myself and the Governor will simply curse.

BERTHA. Is Mr. Bulstead *very* fierce if people are late for dinner?

MONTY. Simply beastly.

BERTHA. How very unpleasant! I wonder if I'm wise to marry into the family?

[*Shaking hands merrily with MRS. DE MULLIN and JANET. Then goes off laughing merrily.*]

MONTY [*sardonically*]. I wonder. [*Shakes hands with MRS. DE MULLIN and JANET.*] Will you give me a kiss, old chap? [*To JOHNNY.*]

JOHNNY. That's three times.

[*MONTY nods. MONTY follows BERTHA off. A long pause. MRS. DE MULLIN looks fixedly at JANET. JANET looks at the ground.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN [*slowly*]. Mr. Montague Bulstead seems unusually fond of children, Janet.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. Does he, mother? [*She does not look up.*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yes. Johnny is rather old to be kissed by strangers.

JANET. I supposed he kissed him because he was brave about being stung.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He seems to have kissed him before. Twice.

JANET. I dare say. I didn't notice.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Johnny did, apparently.

JANET. Well, it doesn't matter anyway, does it? [*Looks up defiantly. Meets her mother's eyes full on her.*] Why do you look at me like that, mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Send Johnny away for a little, Janet. I want to speak to you.

JANET. I'd rather not, mother. He might hurt himself again.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He will be quite safe. Run away, Johnny. But don't go too far.

JOHNNY. All right, grandmother.

[*JOHNNY trots off into the wood. Pause.*

JANET [*defiantly*]. Well, mother?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, why did you never tell us you had met Mr. Bulstead before?

JANET. When?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Any time during the last three days, when we were speaking of his engagement.

JANET. I'd forgotten all about it, mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Indeed? And why didn't you tell us eight years ago, when you met him at Weymouth, when you were still "Miss De Mullin"?

JANET. Mother, don't badger me like this. If you want to ask me anything ask it.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, Mr. Bulstead is Johnny's father.

JANET. Mr. Bulstead ? Absurd !

MRS. DE MULLIN. Then why did you pretend not to have met him ? Why did you conceal the fact of your meeting him from us eight years ago ? And why has he concealed the fact from Bertha and the Bulsteads ? *[Pause.*

JANET *[resignedly]*. Very well, mother, if you're determined to know you must know. Yes, he's Johnny's father.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh, Janet !

JANET *[irritably]*. Well, mother, if you didn't want to know you shouldn't have asked. I told you not to worry me.

*[MRS. DE MULLIN begins to cry.]*

*[Remorsefully.]* There, there, mother ! Don't cry. I'm sorry I was cross to you. Don't let's talk any more about it.

MRS. DE MULLIN *[snuffling]*. No, Janet, we *must* talk about it. There's no use trying to hide things any longer. You must tell me the truth.

JANET. Much better not, mother. It won't give you any pleasure to hear.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, I'd rather know, Janet.

JANET *[shrugs]*. As you please. What do you want me to tell you ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Everything. How did you come to be at Weymouth ? I don't remember your staying at Weymouth eight years ago.

JANET. I wasn't staying there. But Monty was.

MRS. DE MULLIN *[shocked]*. Monty !

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. Mr. Bulstead. Oh, what *does* it matter now? He'd had typhoid and was there to recruit. I'd ridden over on my bicycle . . .

MRS. DE MULLIN [*lamentably*]. Bicycle! I always said it was all through bicycling.

JANET [*another shrug*]. He ran into me, or I ran into him. I was rather shaken, and he asked me to come in and rest. It happened close to the house where he was lodging.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You went in! To his lodgings! A man you had never met before!

JANET. My dear mother, when you have been thrown off a bicycle, ordinary conventions cease to apply. Besides, as a matter of fact, we *had* met once before—the day before, in fact.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Where?

JANET. Here. By this very stile. Monty was riding past and he asked me the way to somewhere—Thoresby, I think. I was standing by the stile. Next day I happened to ride into Weymouth. We collided—and the rest you know.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sternly*]. Were those the *only* times you met him, Janet?

JANET. Of course not, mother. After the Weymouth collision we met constantly, nearly every day. We used to meet out riding, and I had tea with him lots of times in his rooms.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*horrificed*]. How long did this go on?

JANET. More than a month—till he left Weymouth, in fact. Now, mother, is that all you want to know? Because if so we'll drop the subject.



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Oh, Janet, what *will* your father say ?

JANET. Father ? He won't know.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Won't know ? But I must tell him.

JANET. Good heavens ! Why ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. In order that Mr. Bulstead may marry you, of course. Your father will insist on his marrying you.

JANET. If father attempts to do that, mother, I shall deny the whole story. And Monty will back me up.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He would never be so wicked.

JANET. He would have to if I ask him. It's the least he could do.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Johnny is there to prove it.

JANET. There's nothing to prove that Monty is Johnny's father. Nothing whatever.

MRS. DE MULLIN. But, Janet, *why* won't you marry him ?

JANET [*impatiently*]. My dear mother, because I don't want to, of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN. You don't *want* to ?

JANET. Great heavens, no ! Why should I ? Monty Bulstead isn't at all the sort of man I should care to *marry*.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Why not ?

JANET. Frankly, mother, because he's not interesting enough. Monty's a very nice fellow and I like him very much, but I don't want to pass the remainder of my life with him. If I'm to marry anybody—and I don't think I shall—it will have to be a rather more remarkable person than Monty Bulstead.



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Yet you *did* love him, Janet. You must have loved him . . . then.

JANET. Oh, yes. Then. But that was ages ago, before Johnny was born. After that I didn't care for anybody any more except Johnny.

MRS. DE MULLIN. But, Janet, you *ought* to marry him, for Johnny's sake.

JANET. Too late, mother. That should have been eight years ago to be any use.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Better too late than not at all.

JANET. Better not at all than too late.

MRS. DE MULLIN. He seduced you, Janet.

JANET [*thoughtfully*]. Did he? I was twenty-seven. He was twenty. If either of us was to blame, wasn't it I?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, you're trying to screen him.

JANET. Dearest mother, you talk like a sentimental novel.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*indignantly*]. And he's to be allowed to marry Bertha Aldenham, just as if this had never happened?

JANET. Why not? It's not *her* fault, is it? And girls find it difficult enough to get married nowadays, goodness knows.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Still, she *ought* to be told, Janet. I think she *must* be told.

JANET. My dear mother, if *she* knows everybody will know, and the scandal will make all the dead and gone De Mullins turn in their graves. As for father, it would simply kill him out of hand.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sadly*]. Poor father!

JANET [*briskly*]. So, on the whole, I don't think

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

we'll tell any one. Come, mother, it's time we started. [*More kindly.*] Poor mother. Don't fret. Perhaps Hester will have some news to cheer you when we get home.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hester ?

JANET [*rallying her*]. An engagement, mother. Hester's engagement. Hester and Mr. Brown have been decorating the church for the last *four* hours. What an opportunity for a declaration ! Or don't people propose in church ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, how can you laugh after what has happened ?

JANET. Laugh ? Of course I can laugh. What else is there to do ? Let's go home. Johnny ! Johnny.

[*Calls. By this time twilight is falling. A full moon has begun to rise, lighting up the scene.*]

JOHNNY [*off*]. Yes, Mummie.

JANET. Come along, dear. Mother's going to start.

JOHNNY [*off*]. All right, Mummie. [*Entering.* Oh, Mummie, you've not seen my rabbits yet !

JANET. No. It's too dark to-night. Mother must come and see them another time.

JOHNNY. You won't forget, will you, Mummie ? [*Looking at MRS. DE MULLIN.*] Grandmother, you've been crying. Is that because I stung myself with a nettle ?

JANET. Little egoist ! Of course it is. Give your grandmother a kiss and we'll all walk home together.

[*MRS. DE MULLIN stoops and kisses JOHNNY passionately. They go off through the gate and the Curtain falls.*]

# *The Last of the De Mullins*

## ACT III

*Five days have passed since Act II*

SCENE.—*As in Act I. Time, late afternoon. When the curtain rises* MRS. CLOUSTON, MRS. DE MULLIN and JANET *are on the stage. The nervous tension of the last few days has clearly told on* JANET, *who looks feverish and irritable.*

MRS. DE MULLIN [*speaking off into the outer hall*]. Good-bye! Good-bye!

JANET [*who is standing in the middle of the hall, scornfully*]. Good-bye! Good-bye!

MRS. CLOUSTON [*shocked*]. Janet!

JANET [*fiercely*]. How many times a week does that Bulstead woman think it necessary to call on us?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*sitting*]. She doesn't call very often.

JANET. She's been three times this week.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*closing door*]. Naturally she wants to hear how your father is, dear.

JANET [*irritably*]. My dear mother, what *can* it matter to Mrs. Bulstead whether father lives or dies?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET [*exasperated*]. Well, mother, do you seriously believe she cares? Or Miss Deanes? Or Miss Rolt? Or any of these people? They only call because they've nothing better to do. It's sheer mental vacuity on their part. Besides, father's

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

perfectly well now. They know that. But they go on *calling, calling!* I wonder Miss Deanes doesn't bring her cockatoo to inquire.

[*Tramps to and fro impatiently.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really, Janet, I can't think what's the matter with you. Do sit down and try and exercise some self-control.

JANET. I've no self-control where these Brendon people are concerned. They get on my nerves, every one of them. . . . Where's Johnny?

MRS. DE MULLIN. In the garden, I think.

JANET. Sensible boy! He's had enough of visitors for one day, I'll be bound. I'll go out and join him.

[*Goes out angrily.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON. I can't think what's come to Janet the last day or two. Her temper gets worse and worse.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Perhaps it's only the hot weather. No De Mullin——

MRS. CLOUSTON. Nonsense, Jane, don't be foolish. We can't have *Janet* giving way to that sort of thing at her age.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I'm afraid she is rather irritable just now. She flew out quite savagely at Hester to-day just after luncheon.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Why was that?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Because of something she had been teaching Johnny. The Athanasian Creed I think it was. Yes, it must have been that because Johnny asked Janet what was meant by three Incomprehensibles. Janet asked him where he had heard all that, and Johnny said Aunt Hester had taught it to him. Janet was very angry and forbade Hester

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

ever to teach him anything again. Hester was quite hurt about it.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Naturally. Still, I do think Hester might have chosen something else to teach him.

MRS. DE MULLIN. That was what Janet said.

MRS. CLOUSTON. But that's no reason why she shouldn't behave herself when visitors are here. She was quite rude to Mrs. Bulstead. What they think of her in London when she goes on like this I can't imagine.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Perhaps she isn't like this in London.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Of course she is, Jane. Worse. Here she has the restraining influences of home life. Whereas in London, living alone as she does . . .

MRS. DE MULLIN. She has Johnny!

MRS. CLOUSTON. She has Johnny, of course. But that's not enough. She ought to have a husband to look after her.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Yes.

[*Seats herself slowly beside her sister.*]

MRS. CLOUSTON. Where's Hester?

MRS. DE MULLIN. At church, I expect.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Church! Why the girl's always at church.

MRS. DE MULLIN. It's a Wednesday. And it does no harm, I think.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Let us hope not, Jane.

[*DE MULLIN enters by the door on the left. He has evidently got over his recent attack and looks comparatively hale and vigorous.*]

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Have you had your nap, Hugo ?

DE MULLIN. Yes. The sunset woke me, I suppose. It was shining full on my face.

MRS. DE MULLIN. What a pity it woke you.

DE MULLIN. It didn't matter. I've slept enough.

. . . [*Wanders towards sofa.*] Where's Johnny ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. In the garden, I think, with Janet.

DE MULLIN [*wanders to window and looks out*]. Yes. 'There he is. He's playing hide-and-seek with Ellen. . . . Now she's caught him. No, he's got away. Bravo, Johnny ! [*Stands watching intently for a while. Then turns and comes down.*] What a fine little fellow it is ! A true De Mullin !

MRS. DE MULLIN. Do you think so, Hugo ?

DE MULLIN. Every inch of him ! [*Pause, sits, half to himself.*] If only Janet had been married !

MRS. DE MULLIN [*sighs*]. Yes.

DE MULLIN [*musings*]. I wonder who the father really was. [*Looking up.*] She has never told you, Jane, I suppose ?

MRS. DE MULLIN [*steadily, without looking up*]. No, Hugo.

MRS. CLOUSTON. And never will. Nobody was ever so obstinate as Janet.

DE MULLIN [*nods sadly*]. Janet always had plenty of will.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Far too much ! [*Pause.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. You'll quite miss Johnny when he goes away from us, won't you, Hugo ?

DE MULLIN. Yes. I never thought I could grow so fond of a child. The house will seem empty without him.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. I shall miss him too.

DE MULLIN. We shall all miss him. [*Pause. Thoughtfully.*] I wonder if Janet would leave him with us when she goes back to London?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Leave him with us? Altogether, you mean?

DE MULLIN. Yes.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I'm afraid not, Hugo. In fact, I'm quite sure she would not. She's so fond of Johnny.

DE MULLIN. I suppose she wouldn't. [*Pause.*] I was greatly shocked at what you told me about her the other day, Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. About her keeping a shop, you mean?

DE MULLIN. Yes. And going into partnership with a Miss Higgs or Hicks. It all sounds most discreditable.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Deplorable.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*meekly*]. She had to do something to keep herself, Hugo.

DE MULLIN. No doubt. Still, it can't be considered a proper sort of position for my daughter. I think she must give it up at once.

MRS. DE MULLIN. She would only have to take to something else.

DE MULLIN. Not necessarily. She might come back here to live with us . . . with Johnny, of course.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*astonished*]. *Live* with us?

DE MULLIN. Why not, Jane?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Well, of course, if *you* think so, Hugo.



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. CLOUSTON. Are you sure you will like to have Janet living at home again, Hugo ?

DE MULLIN. I think it might be the best arrangement. And I shall like to have Johnny here. He's our only descendant, Harriet, the last of the De Mullins. If you or Jane had had a son it would be different.

MRS. CLOUSTON [*sighs*]. Yes.

DE MULLIN. As it is I don't see how we can do anything better than have them both down here—as Jane doesn't think Janet would part with Johnny. It would be better for Janet, too. It would take her away from her present unsatisfactory surroundings. It would give her a position and independence—everything she now lacks.

MRS. DE MULLIN. I should have thought she was *independent* now, Hugo.

DE MULLIN [*irritably*]. My dear Jane, how can a woman possibly be independent whose income comes out of selling hats ? The only form of independence that is possible or desirable for a woman is that she shall be dependent upon her husband or, if she is unmarried, on her nearest male relative. I am sure *you* agree with me, Harriet ?

MRS. CLOUSTON. Quite, Hugo.

DE MULLIN. Very well. I will speak to her about it at once.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*nervously*]. I hardly think I would say anything about it to-day, Hugo.

DE MULLIN. Why not, Jane ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Well, she seems nervous and irritable to-day. I think I should put it off for a day or two.



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

DE MULLIN [*testily*]. My dear Jane, you are always procrastinating. If such an arrangement is to be made the sooner it is made the better. [*Goes to window and calls.*] Janet, my dear ! Janet !

[*Pause. Then JANET appears at centre window.*

JANET. Did you call me, father ?

DE MULLIN. Yes. Come to me for a moment. I want to speak to you. [DE MULLIN *wanders undecidedly to the fire-place. A moment later JANET enters from the garden.*] Is Johnny with you ?

JANET. No. He's having tea with Ellen. I said he might. [*Pause. JANET comes down.*

DE MULLIN. Janet, your mother and I have been talking over your future.

JANET. Have you, father ?

[*With a quick glance at her mother. MRS. DE MULLIN, however, makes no sign.*]

DE MULLIN. Yes. We have come to the conclusion that it would be better for you to come back here to live.

[JANET *faces round towards her father.*]

JANET. But what would become of the business ?

DE MULLIN. You will have to give up the business, of course. So much the better. You never ought to have gone into it. It was not at all a suitable occupation for you.

JANET. But I like it, father.

MRS. CLOUSTON. *Like it ! A De Mullin like keeping a shop ! Impossible.*

JANET [*firmly*]. Yes, Aunt Harriet, I like it. And I'm proud of it.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

DE MULLIN [*sharply*]. Nonsense, Janet. Nobody can possibly be proud of keeping a shop.

JANET. *I am.* I made it, you see. It's my child, like Johnny.

DE MULLIN [*amazed*]. Janet! Do you understand what you're doing? I offer you the chance of returning to Brendon to live as my daughter.

JANET [*indifferently*]. I quite understand, father. And I'm much obliged for the offer. Only I decline it. That's all.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really!

DE MULLIN [*with dignity*]. The question is, are you to be allowed to decline it, in Johnny's interests if not your own?

JANET. Johnny's?

DE MULLIN. Yes. Johnny's. As long as he was a child it made little difference where he was brought up. Relatively little that is. Now he is getting to an age when early associations are all-important. Living here at Brendon in the home of his ancestors he will grow up worthy of the race from which he is descended. He will be a true De Mullin.

JANET [*quietly*]. Perhaps I don't want him to be a true De Mullin, father.

DE MULLIN. What do you mean?

JANET. My dear father, you're infatuated about your De Mullins. Who are the De Mullins after all? Mere country squires who lived on here down at Brendon generation after generation. What have they ever done that I should want Johnny to be like them? Nothing. There's not one of them who has ever distinguished himself in the smallest degree

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

or made his name known outside his native village. The De Mullins are, and have always been, nobodies. Look at their portraits. Is there a single one of them that is worth a second glance? Why they never even had the brains to be painted by a decent artist. With the result that they aren't worth the canvas they're painted on. Or is it board? I'd make a bonfire of them if they were mine.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET [*impatiently*]. I would. You seem to think there's some peculiar virtue about always living in the same place. I believe in people uprooting themselves and doing something with their lives. What was the good of the De Mullins going on living down here century after century, always a little poorer, and a little poorer, selling a farm here, mortgaging another there, instead of going out into the world to seek their fortunes? We've stayed too long in one place, we De Mullins. We shall never be worth anything sleeping away our lives down at Brendon.

DE MULLIN [*sharply*]. Janet, you are talking foolishly. What you say only makes it clearer to me that you cannot be allowed to live by yourself in London any longer. Such a life is demoralising to you. You must come back to Brendon.

JANET. I shall not come back to Brendon, father. On that I am quite determined.

DE MULLIN [*with dignity*]. My dear, this is not a matter that rests with you. My mind is made up. Hitherto I have only asked you to return. Do not force me to command you.

JANET [*fiercely*]. Command? By what right do you command?

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

DE MULLIN. By the right of a father, Janet. By that right I insist on your obedience.

JANET [*losing her temper*]. Obedience ! Obedience ! I owe no one obedience. I am of full age and can order my life as I please. Is a woman never to be considered old enough to manage her own affairs ? Is she to go down to her grave everlastingly under tutelage ? Is she always to be obeying a father when she's not obeying a husband ? Well, I for one will not submit to such nonsense. I'm sick of this everlasting *obedience*.

DE MULLIN [*fiercely*]. Janet . . . !

[*Door opens on the left. ELLEN enters with the lamp. There is a considerable pause, during which ELLEN puts down the lamp, turns it up, pulls down the blind and begins to draw the curtains. In the middle of the last process DE MULLIN intervenes.*]

DE MULLIN [*irritably*]. You can leave the curtains, Ellen.

ELLEN. Very well, sir.

[*Exit ELLEN with maddening deliberation. Pause.*]

JANET. Father, I'm sorry if what I said vexed you. Perhaps I spoke too strongly.

DE MULLIN [*with great dignity*]. Very well, Janet. You will remain with us.

JANET. No, father, that's not possible. For Johnny's sake, as well as my own, it would be madness for us to live down here.

DE MULLIN. For Johnny's sake ?

JANET. Yes, Johnny's. In London we're not known, he and I. There he's simply Johnny Seagrave, the son of a respectable widow who keeps

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

a hat-shop. Here he is the son of Janet De Mullin who ran away from home one night eight years ago and whose name was never mentioned again by her parents until one fine day she turned up with an eight-year-old boy and said she was married. How long would they take to see through *that* story down here, do you think?

MRS. CLOUSTON [*tartly*]. Whose fault is that?

JANET. Never mind whose fault it is, Aunt Harriet. The question is, will they see through it or will they not? Of course they *know* nothing so far, but I've no doubt they suspect. What else have people to do down here but suspect other people? Miss Deanes murmurs her doubts to Mrs. Bulstead and Mrs. Bulstead shakes her head to Miss Deanes. Mrs. Bulstead! What right has *she* to look down that huge nose of hers at *me*! She's had *ten* children!

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet! She's married.

JANET. To Mr. Bulstead! That vulgar animal! You don't ask me to consider that a *merit*, do you? No, Mrs. Bulstead shan't have the chance of sneering at Johnny if *I* can help it. Or at me either.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet, listen to me. You don't understand how your father feels about this or how much it means to him. Johnny is his only grandchild—our only descendant. He would adopt him and call him De Mullin, and then the name would not die out. You know how much your father thinks of that and how sorry he has always been that I never had a son.

JANET [*more gently*]. I know, mother. But when Hester marries . . .

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

DE MULLIN. Hester ?

JANET. Yes.

DE MULLIN [*turning angrily to his wife*]. But whom is Hester going to marry ? *Is* she going to marry ? I have heard nothing about this. What's this, Jane ? Has something been kept from me ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. No, no, Hugo. Nothing has been kept from you. It's only some fancy of Janet's. She thinks Mr. Brown is going to propose to Hester. There's nothing in it, really.

DE MULLIN. Mr. Brown ! Impossible !

MRS. CLOUSTON. Quite impossible !

JANET [*calmly*]. Why impossible, father ?

DE MULLIN. He would never dare to do such a thing. *Mr. Brown* to have the audacity to propose to *my* daughter !

JANET [*quietly*]. Why not, father ?

DE MULLIN [*bubbling with rage*]. Because he is not of a suitable position. Because the *De Mullins* cannot be expected to marry people of *that* class. Because . . .

JANET [*sbrugs*]. I dare say Mr. Brown won't think of all that. Anyhow, I hope he won't. I hope he'll propose to Hester and she'll accept him and then when they've a whole herd of little Browns you can select one of them and make a De Mullin of him, poor little wretch.

[*At this moment HESTER enters from the garden. An uncomfortable silence falls.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hush, hush, Janet. Here is Hester. Is that you, Hester ? Have you come from church ?



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

HESTER. Yes, mother.

[*She comes down, her face looking pale and drawn, and stands by her mother.*]

MRS. DE MULLIN. You're very late, dear.

HESTER. A little. I stayed on after service was over.

MRS. CLOUSTON. How very eccentric of you !

HESTER [*quietly*]. I suppose saying one's prayers does seem eccentric to you, Aunt Harriet.

MRS. CLOUSTON. My dear Hester, considering you'd only just finished *one* service . . .

JANET [*who has not noticed the look on her sister's face*]. Well, Aunt Harriet, who was right ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hush, Janet !

JANET [*gaily*]. My dear mother, what on earth is there to "hush" about ? And what on earth is there to keep Hester in church half an hour after service is over, if it's not what I told you ?

HESTER. What do you mean ?

JANET. Nothing, dear. Come and give me a kiss. [*Pulling her towards her.*]

HESTER [*repulsing her roughly*]. I won't. Leave me alone, Janet. What has she been saying about me, mother ? I insist on knowing.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Nothing, dear. Only some nonsense about you and Mr. Brown. Janet is always talking nonsense.

JANET. Yes, Hester. About you and Mr. Brown. *Your* Mr. Brown. Confess he has asked you to marry him, as I said ?

HESTER [*slowly*]. Mr. Brown is engaged to be married to Agatha Bulstead. He told me so this evening after service.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

JANET. He told you !

HESTER. Yes. He asked me to congratulate him.

JANET. The little wretch !

MRS. DE MULLIN. To Agatha Bulstead ? That's the plain one, isn't it ?

HESTER. The third one. Yes.

JANET. The plain one ! Good heavens, it oughtn't to be allowed. The children will be little monsters.

MRS. CLOUSTON. So that's why you were so long at church ?

HESTER. Yes. I was praying that they might be happy.

JANET. Poor Hester !

MRS. DE MULLIN. Are you disappointed, dear ?

HESTER. I'd rather not talk about it if you don't mind, mother.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Your father would never have given his consent.

HESTER. So Mr. Brown said.

JANET. The little *worm*.

MRS. DE MULLIN. My dear !

JANET. Well, mother, isn't it too contemptible ?

DE MULLIN. I'm bound to say Mr. Brown seems to have behaved in a very fitting manner.

JANET. You think so, father ?

DE MULLIN. Certainly. He saw what my objections would be and recognised that they were reasonable. Nothing could be more proper.

JANET. Well, father, I don't know what you do want. Ten minutes ago you were supposed to be wanting a grandson to adopt. Here's Hester going the right way to provide one, and you don't like that either.



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

HESTER. What is all this about, father ? What have you all been discussing while I've been out ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. It was nothing about you, Hester.

HESTER. I'm not sure of that, mother. Anyhow I should like to hear what it was.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Hester, that is not at all a proper tone to use in speaking to your mother.

HESTER [*fiercely*]. Please don't interfere, Aunt Harriet. I suppose I can be trusted to speak to my mother properly by this time.

MRS. CLOUSTON. You certainly ought to, my dear. You are quite old enough.

HESTER. Very well, then. Perhaps you will be good enough not to dictate to me in future. What was it you were discussing, father ?

JANET. I'll tell you, Hester. Father wanted to adopt Johnny. He wanted me to come down here to live altogether.

HESTER. Indeed ? Well, father, understand, please, that if Janet comes down here to live, *I go* !

MRS. DE MULLIN. Hester !

HESTER. I will not live in the same house with Janet. Nothing shall induce me. I would rather beg my bread.

JANET. That settles it then. Thanks, Hester. I'm glad you had the pluck to say that. You are right. Quite right.

HESTER. I can do without *your* approval, Janet.

JANET [*recklessly*]. Of course you can. But you can have it all the same. You never wanted me down here. You always disapproved of my being sent for. I ought never to have come. I wish I

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

hadn't come. My coming has only done harm to Hester, as she knew it would.

DE MULLIN. How harm ?

JANET. Mr. Brown would have asked Hester to marry him if I hadn't come. He meant to ; I'm sure of it.

MRS. DE MULLIN. But he said . . .

JANET. I know. But that was only an excuse. Young men aren't so considerate of their future fathers-in-law as all that nowadays. No. Mr. Brown heard some story about me from Miss Deanes. Or perhaps the Vicar put him on his guard. Isn't it so, Hester ?

[HESTER *nods*.]

MRS. DE MULLIN. But as your father would never have consented, dear . . .

HESTER [*slowly*]. Still, I'd rather he had asked me, mother.

JANET. Quite right, Hester ! I'm glad you've got some wholesome feminine vanity left in your composition. And you'd have said "yes," like a sensible woman.

HESTER. Oh, you're always sneering !

JANET. Yes. But I'm *going*, Hester, *going* ! *That's* the great thing. Keep your eyes fixed steadily on that and you'll be able to bear anything else. That reminds me. [*Goes to door and calls loudly into the hall.*] Johnny ! Johnny !

MRS. CLOUSTON. Really, Janet !

JANET. Oh, I forgot. It's not genteel to call into the passage, is it ? I ought to have rung. I apologise, Aunt Harriet. [*Calls again.*] Johnny !

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

MRS. DE MULLIN. Why are you calling Johnny ?

JANET. To tell him to put on his hat and coat, mother dear. I'm going to the station.

DE MULLIN. You're going to-night ?

JANET. Yes, father, to-night. I've done harm enough down here. I'm going away.

JOHNNY [*entering*]. Do you want me, Mummie ?

JANET. Yes. Run and put on your things and say good-bye to Cook and Ellen and tell Robert to put in the pony. Mother's going back to London.

JOHNNY. Are we going now, Mummie ?

JANET [*nods*]. As fast as the train can carry us. And tell Ellen to lock my trunk for me and give you the key. Run along. [*Exit* JOHNNY.]

DE MULLIN. Lock your trunk ! But you've not packed ?

JANET. Oh yes, I have. Everything's packed, down to my last shoelace. I don't know how often I haven't packed and unpacked during the last five days.

MRS. DE MULLIN [*astonished and hurt*]. You meant to leave us then, Janet ? You've been *wanting* to leave us all the time ?

JANET. Yes, mother. I've been wanting to leave you. I can't stay here any longer. Brendon stifles me. It has too many ghosts. I suppose it's your ridiculous De Mullins.

DE MULLIN. Janet !

JANET. I know, father. That's blasphemy, isn't it ? But I can't help it. I must go. I've been meaning to tell you every day for the last four days, but somehow I always put it off.

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

DE MULLIN. Understand me, Janet. If you leave this house to-night you leave it for ever.

JANET [*cheerfully*]. All right, father.

DE MULLIN [*growing angrier*]. Understand, too, that if you leave it you are never to hold communication with me or with any one in it henceforward. You are cut off from the family. I will never see you or recognise you in any way, or speak to you again as long as I live.

JANET [*astonished*]. My dear father, why are you so angry? Is there anything so dreadful in my wanting to live in London instead of in the country?

DE MULLIN [*getting more and more excited*]. Why am I angry? Why am I . . . ?

MRS. DE MULLIN. Sh! Hugo! You mustn't excite yourself. You know the doctor said . . .

DE MULLIN. Be quiet, Jane! [*Turning furiously to JANET.*] Why am I angry? You disgrace the family. You have a child, that poor fatherless boy . . .

JANET [*quietly*]. Oh come, I could have got along quite well without a father, if it comes to that. And so could Hester.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet!

JANET. Well, mother, what has father ever done for Hester or me except try and prevent us from doing something we wanted to do? Hester wanted to marry Mr. Brown. Father wouldn't have allowed her. He's not genteel enough to marry a De Mullin. I want to go back to my shop. Father objects to that. That's not genteel enough for a De Mullin either. Well, hang all the De Mullins, say I!

DE MULLIN [*furiously*]. I forbid you to speak of

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

your family in that way—of *my* family. I forbid it! It is an outrage. Your ancestors were honourable men and pure women. They did their duty in the position in which they were born, and handed on their name untarnished to their children. Hitherto our honour has been unsullied. You have sullied it. You have brought shame upon your parents and shame upon your son, and that shame you can never wipe out. If you had in you a spark of human feeling, if you were not worthless and heartless you would blush to look me in the face or your child in the face. But you are utterly hardened. I ought never to have offered to receive you back into this house. I ought never to have consented to see you again. I was wrong. I regret it. You are unfit for the society of decent people. Go back to London. Take up the wretched trade you practise there. It is what you are fit for.

JANET. That's exactly what I think, father. As we agree about it why make such a fuss?

DE MULLIN [*furious*]. Janet . . .

HESTER. Father, don't argue with her. It's no use. [*Solemnly*.] Leave her to God.

JANET. Hester, Hester, don't deceive yourself. In your heart you envy me my baby, and you know it.

HESTER [*indignant*]. I do not.

JANET. You do. Time is running on with you, my dear. You're twenty-eight. Just the age that I was when I met my lover. Yes, my lover. In a few years you will be too old for love, too old to have children. So soon it passeth away and we are gone. Your best years are slipping by and you are growing faded and cross and peevish. Already the

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

lines are hardening about your mouth and the hollows coming under your eyes. You will be an old woman before your time unless you marry and have children. And what will you do then? Keep a lap-dog, I suppose, or sit up at night with a sick cockatoo like Miss Deanes. Miss Deanes! Even she has a heart somewhere about her. Do you imagine she wouldn't rather give it to her babies than snivel over *poultry*? No, Hester, make good use of your youth, my dear. It won't last always. And once gone it is gone for ever. [HESTER *bursts into tears*.] There, there, Hester! I'm sorry. I oughtn't to have spoken like that. It wasn't kind. Forgive me. [HESTER *weeps more and more violently*.] Hester, don't cry like that. I can't bear to hear you. I was angry and said more than I should. I didn't mean to vex you. Come, dear, you mustn't give way like that or you'll make yourself ill. Dry your eyes and let me see you smile. [*Caressing her*.] HESTER, *who has begun by resisting her feebly, gradually allows herself to be soothed*.] That's better! My dear, what a sight you've made of yourself! But all women are hideous when they've been crying. It makes their noses red, and that's dreadfully unbecoming. [HESTER *sobs out a laugh*.] No. You mustn't begin to cry again or I shall scold you. I shall, really.

HESTER [*half laughing, half crying hysterically*]. You seem to think every woman ought to behave as shamefully as you did.

JANET [*grimly*]. No, Hester. I don't think that. To do as I did needs pluck and brains—and five hundred pounds. Everything most women haven't



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

got, poor things. So they must marry or remain childless. You must marry—the next curate. I suppose the Bulsteads will buy Mr. Brown a living as he's marrying the plainest of the daughters. It's the least they can do. But that's no reason why *I* should marry unless I choose.

MRS. CLOUSTON. Well, I've never heard of anything so disgraceful. I thought Janet at least had the grace to be ashamed of what she did !

JANET [*genuinely astonished*]. Ashamed ? Ashamed of wanting to have a child ? What on earth were women created for, Aunt Harriet, if not to have children ?

MRS. CLOUSTON. To *marry* and have children.

JANET [*with relentless logic*]. My dear Aunt Harriet, women had children thousands of years before marriage was invented. I dare say they will go on doing so thousands of years after it has ceased to exist.

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet !

JANET. Well, mother, that's how I feel. And I believe it's how all wholesome women feel if they would only acknowledge it. I *wanted* to have a child. I always did from the time when I got too old to play with dolls. Not an adopted child or a child of some one else's, but a baby of my very own. Of course I wanted to marry. That's the ordinary way a woman wants to be a mother nowadays, I suppose. But time went on and nobody came forward, and I saw myself getting old and my chance slipping away. Then I met—never mind. And I fell in love with him. Or, perhaps, I only fell in love with love. I don't know. It was so splendid

## *The Last of the De Mullins*

to find some one at last who really cared for me as women should be cared for ! Not to talk to because I was clever or to play tennis with because I was strong, but to kiss me and to make love to me ! Yes ! To make love to me !

DE MULLIN [*solemnly*]. Listen to me, my girl. You say that now, and I dare say you believe it. But when you are older, when Johnny is grown up, you will bitterly repent having brought into the world a child who can call no man father.

JANET [*passionately*]. Never ! Never ! That I'm sure of. Whatever happens, even if Johnny should come to hate me for what I did, I shall always be glad to have been his mother. At least I shall have lived. These poor women who go through life listless and dull, who have never felt the joys and the pains a mother feels, how they would envy me if they knew ! If they knew ! To know that a child is your very own, is a part of you. That you have faced sickness and pain and death itself for it. That it is yours and nothing can take it from you because no one can understand its wants as you do. To feel its soft breath on your cheek, to soothe it when it is fretful and still it when it cries, that is motherhood and that is glorious !

[JOHNNY runs in by the door on the left. He is obviously in the highest spirits at the thought of going home.]

JOHNNY. The trap is round, Mummie, and the luggage is in.

JANET. That's right. Good-bye, father. [*He*  
86

ACT III



## *The Last of the De Mullins*

*does not move.*] Say good-bye to your grandfather, Johnny. You won't see him again.

[DE MULLIN *kisses* JOHNNY.]

MRS. DE MULLIN. Janet !

JANET. No, mother. It's best not. [*Kisses her.*] It would only be painful for father. Good-bye, Aunt Harriet. Good-bye, Hester.

[*Looks at* HESTER *doubtfully.* HESTER *rises, goes to her slowly and kisses her.*]

HESTER. Good-bye.

[*Exeunt* JOHNNY and JANET *by the door on the right.*]

DE MULLIN [*his grey head bowed on his chest as* MRS. DE MULLIN *timidly lays her hand on his shoulder*]. The last of the De Mullins ! The last of the De Mullins !

[*The Curtain falls.*]



## THE BURGLAR WHO FAILED



CHARACTERS

MRS. MAXWELL

DOLLY, *her daughter*

BILL BLUDGEON

SCENE : Dolly's bedroom in the Maxwells' house at Wimbledon.



## THE BURGLAR WHO FAILED

SCENE.—DOLLY's bedroom in the MAXWELLS' house at Wimbledon. The prevailing note of the room is white. Mantelpiece, woodwork and the furniture are all painted white. The wall-paper and carpet are of a quiet, restful green, and the only colour is in the bright chintz of the window curtains, the chair cushions and the valance of the bed. There is no suggestion of "High Art" about the decoration of the room, nor yet of luxury, only of cleanness and daintiness and fresh air. It is not aggressively tidy, for DOLLY has just taken off her things and is not very careful about where she throws them down. An old tennis racquet leans against the washing-stand near the door. A cricket bat and a hockey stick are leaning against a chair near the window. On the mantelpiece, a framed photograph or two of DOLLY's school friends, and an alarm clock. The room is lighted by electric lights controlled by a switch in the wall within easy reach both of any one lying in bed and also of anyone entering by the door. When the curtain rises MRS. MAXWELL, in evening dress, is sitting in a wicker chair. DOLLY, in her night-gown with red slippers on her feet, is standing by the bed. She has her hair down. She picks up evening skirt from the bed

## *The Burglar who Failed*

*and throws it on to the chair by the bedside, on which a white evening blouse already lies. Then she turns to the dressing-table.*

MRS. MAXWELL [*remonstrating*]. Dolly !

DOLLY. What is it, mother ?

MRS. MAXWELL. You're not going to leave that skirt there, are you ?

DOLLY. Why not, mother ?

[*Beginning to brush hair with great vigour.*

MRS. MAXWELL. Because it ought to be hung up, of course. What do I give you a wardrobe for if not to hang your things in ?

DOLLY [*still brushing*]. All right, mother. I will in a minute.

MRS. MAXWELL. [*complainingly*]. How can you expect your dresses to look tidy if you fling them about like that ? I'm sure if I've told you about hanging things up once I've told you a hundred times.

DOLLY [*laughing*]. You have, mother dear. You have. I'm an undutiful daughter and that's all about it. [*Goes and hangs up skirt in wardrobe.*]  
'There ! Is that all right ?

MRS. MAXWELL. Now, there's the blouse !

[*The removal of the skirt has revealed the blouse.*

DOLLY [*laughing again*]. I forgot the blouse. [*Folds it rapidly on bed.*] I do hate folding things up. I always crumple them. [*Puts it away in drawer of wardrobe.*] There ! That's done ! Say I'm a good girl, mother.

[*Lays a hand on her shoulder.* MRS. MAXWELL. *pats it.* Then DOLLY returns to the dressing-table and brushes hair more vigorously than ever.]



## *The Burglar who Failed*

MRS. MAXWELL [*half horrified, half amused*]. My dear ! Do be careful with your hair. How can you be so rough with it !

DOLLY. It doesn't mind, bless you.

MRS. MAXWELL. You'll tear it out by the roots if you brush it like that. Brush it gently.

DOLLY. Then it takes so long. However, it's done now. [*Begins to plait it rapidly for the night.*]

MRS. MAXWELL. I'm sure my hair would never stand such treatment !

DOLLY [*laughing*]. I expect you've pampered it, mother. [*Lays a hand on her shoulder again, caressingly.*]

MRS. MAXWELL. Silly child ! And now get into bed and go to sleep. It's getting late.

DOLLY. In a minute. I must look at my bat first. I oiled it this afternoon. I want to see how it's getting on.

[*Takes the cricket-bat from its place by the window, and examines it critically.*]

MRS. MAXWELL. Can't you do that to-morrow ?

DOLLY. I might, of course. But I don't think I will. I'm afraid I shall want a new bat soon, mother. This one's getting awfully old, though it is a dear.

MRS. MAXWELL [*sighs*]. The number of things girls want nowadays is simply dreadful. I can't think why you want to play cricket at all. You were playing hockey only the other day.

DOLLY. Yes. But the hockey season's over now. You can't play hockey in summer, can you ?

MRS. MAXWELL. I don't know.

DOLLY. Of course you can't. It's too hot. One must play cricket in summer. [*Puts back the bat in*

## *The Burglar who Failed*

*its place and takes up the hockey stick, which she brandishes for a moment.]* No more hockey now till the autumn.

MRS. MAXWELL. Do be careful, dear. You'll break something.

DOLLY. It's all right, mother.

*[Brandishing stick, but more gently.]*

MRS. MAXWELL. I never understand why girls play hockey at all. Or cricket either. They seem to me horrid games. And I'm sure they're dangerous. Why can't you be contented to play lawn tennis? Or croquet, as I used to do?

DOLLY. I can't bear croquet, mother. I call it a rotten game.

MRS. MAXWELL. Dolly!

DOLLY *[putting back hockey stick]*. What? Oh, I forgot. I mustn't say "rotten," must I? But it is rather a rotten game, isn't it? And tennis isn't up to much either compared to cricket. Besides, I can't play tennis till I have a new racquet. *[Mrs. Maxwell groans.]* Mine's sprung. *[Takes it up and sounds it critically on the floor.]* I can hear it.

MRS. MAXWELL *[comic exasperation]*. Dolly, go to bed.

DOLLY. All right, mother. *[Puts back the racquet.]* As soon as I've opened the window. *[She pulls back the curtains.]* Oh, it is open. That's all right. *[Leans out.]* I say, what a lovely moon! It's as bright as day.

MRS. MAXWELL. Do you mean to say it's been open all the evening?

DOLLY *[carelessly]*. What? The window? I dare say.

## *The Burglar who Failed*

MRS. MAXWELL. Oh, Dolly ! When you know Mrs. Summerville had her watch stolen from her dressing-table less than a month ago just through that. The man got in while they were at dinner. Mrs. Summerville was so vexed. She valued that watch.

DOLLY. It's all right, mother. No one would get in up here. It's too high.

MRS. MAXWELL. One never knows. They might climb up by the creeper. Or a pipe, or something. And there have been such a number of burglaries in Wimbledon lately. The Mallabys' dog was shot by one only last week.

DOLLY. Yes. Poor Binky !

MRS. MAXWELL. And one broke into the McAndrews' the week before. Major McAndrew actually saw him. A dreadful-looking man with a huge nose and the most ruffianly expression. A perfect savage, the Major said. It's a wonder the Major wasn't killed. No, Dolly, I can't have the windows left open at night while we're downstairs. With your father in India and Gerald at Oxford it's not safe.

DOLLY. All right, mother dear, I'll remember. [*Turning to the bed.*] And now I really think I'm ready.

MRS. MAXWELL. At last ! [*Rises.*] Aren't you going to draw your curtains ? You'll never be able to sleep with all that moonlight.

DOLLY. Oh yes, I shall. I like the moon. It looks so pretty. And if the curtains are drawn it keeps out all the air. [*Puts off slippers and jumps into bed.*]

MRS. MAXWELL [*shivering*]. Well, if you catch your death of cold don't blame me.

## *The Burglar who Failed*

DOLLY. I never catch cold, mother. Good-night.

MRS. MAXWELL [*at bedside*]. Good-night. [*Kisses her, goes to the door and opens it.*] Sleep well.

DOLLY. Yes, mother. Good-night.

[*Exit MRS. MAXWELL. DOLLY snuggles herself down in bed and turns off the light. The room is left in darkness save for a broad band of moonlight which streams in from the window diagonally across the floor, reaching as far as the foot of the bed. For a moment or two there is silence, broken only by DOLLY's regular breathing. Then the chair at foot of bed is pushed cautiously away and the head of BILL BLUDGEON is thrust out from under the bed into the moonlight. It is a villainous-looking head with tousled red hair, ragged beard and a hooked nose of huge proportions. He looks round to see if the coast is clear, blinks at the moonlight and rubs his eyes irritably. He is just about to crawl out of his hiding-place when DOLLY turns over in her bed. Head bobs swiftly under bed again. Another pause. Then head once more slowly thrust out. BLUDGEON is just about to crawl out when a sharp knock is heard as of something being dropped. DOLLY starts up. Head withdrawn again.*]

DOLLY [*startled but not alarmed at all*]. What was that ? [*Turns on light.*] Come in. [*Silence.*] Is that you, mother ? [*Silence. To herself.*] I thought I heard a knock. [*Gets up.*] Is any one there ? [*To herself.*] I'm sure I heard something. [*Puts on slippers, gets dressing-gown from wardrobe, then goes to door, opens it and looks out.*] No one. The lights are all out. I must have dreamt it. [*Shuts door and*

98

## *The Burglar who Failed*

turns away. *As she does so a resounding sneeze comes from under the bed. Then another and another. She seizes hockey stick from the corner by window and goes to foot of bed.]* Who's that? Who is it? [*Head thrust out.*] Oh! It's a burglar!

BLUDGEON [*in ferocious undertone*]. Yes, it's me, missie. And if you scream or raise your voice it'll be the worse for you!

*[Begins to crawl out on hands and knees.*

DOLLY. Go back! Go back at once or I'll hit you! [*Raises stick menacingly.*

BLUDGEON. Now then, young woman, none o' that! You can't hurt me, you know.

DOLLY. Can't I?

*[Hits him sharply over the fingers.*

BLUDGEON. Ow! [*Cry of pain.*

DOLLY. Go back when I tell you! If you don't I'll hit you again. [*Hits other hand smartly.*

BLUDGEON. Ow!

DOLLY. I told you I would. Go back. [*Hits ground in front of his fingers. BLUDGEON backs hurriedly under bed again.*] What do you mean by being in my room like this? What do you mean? . . . Ah, would you?

*[This as head emerges from under side of bed facing audience. She brings down stick within an inch of it. BLUDGEON draws it back sharply, thereby hitting it hard against the bed.]*

BLUDGEON. Ow!

DOLLY. There! Now you've hurt yourself!

## *The Burglar who Failed*

[BLUDGEON makes another attempt to emerge by the front of the bed. He is again driven back by stick.] But it's no more than you deserve for coming here at all!

[For a moment nothing is heard save DOLLY's excited breathing. Then the valance is cautiously raised and his head is seen. It does not, however, venture to protrude as the stick is raised menacingly.]

BLUDGEON. Look here, missie, this won't do, you know.

DOLLY. Won't it?

BLUDGEON. No, it won't. You can't keep me under this bed all night, can you? 'Tain't likely. Now I don't want to have to hurt you——

DOLLY. Hurt me! [Scornfully.]

BLUDGEON. But I'm an ugly customer to tackle. I'm Bill Bludgeon, I am, and if that name doesn't tell you the sort of man you've got to deal with, why it ought to. Now it's no use your shouting out or calling for help, because there ain't no men in the house, as I know very well, and there ain't no police within a mile, neither. So just you put down that stick and behave yourself or I'll have to make you!

DOLLY [scornfully]. How will you make me?

BLUDGEON. With this.

[Suddenly produces revolver and levels it at her. She starts back.]

DOLLY [indignant]. Oh!

BLUDGEON [sneer]. Ah, I thought I should scare you! Now p'raps you'll let me come out.

[Starts to do so.]

DOLLY. You wicked ruffian! [Hits his hand



## *The Burglar who Failed*

*sharply with stick. He drops revolver. With dexterous sweep of hockey stick she sweeps it over to herself, picks it up, cocks it and levels it at his head.]* If you move another inch I'll fire.

BLUDGEON [*in terror, entire change of tone. Gruff menace turned to shrill note of alarm.*] Look out! You've cocked it! It'll go off if you're not careful. It's loaded. [*Backing ignominiously.*]

DOLLY [*scornfully*]. Of course, it's loaded. What's the good of carrying a revolver if it isn't loaded?

BLUDGEON [*almost whimpering with terror*]. Put it down, miss, for Heaven's sake! It's not safe, I tell you.

DOLLY. You coward! I believe you're afraid!

BLUDGEON. I should think I was afraid. Trust a woman with loaded firearms? Not me! [*Entreating.*] Put it down, there's a good girl. You'll kill me, I know you will. *Do put it DOWN!*

DOLLY. Sh! If I put it down, how am I to know you won't get violent again?

BLUDGEON. Violent! Me violent now? Why, I couldn't if I tried, miss. My nerve's gone. I'm all of a tremble. I couldn't hurt a fly now, not if it was to save my life. Do put it down and let me get out of this.

DOLLY. If I do, will you promise to behave yourself?

BLUDGEON [*eagerly*]. Yes, yes, miss. I'll promise. I'll promise anything.

DOLLY. But you must be serious about it. You're not serious.

BLUDGEON [*his voice rising to almost a scream of mingled nervousness and terror*]. Not serious! With

## *The Burglar who Failed*

you flourishing a loaded revolver within an inch of my nose! Not serious?

DOLLY. Hush! You'll wake some one.

BLUDGEON [*half whimper, half whisper*]. Not serious? Oh, Lord!

DOLLY. Very well. I'll let you get up if you'll promise to go away quietly and never come here again.

BLUDGEON [*eagerly*]. I promise, miss. I promise faithfully.

DOLLY. And you'll keep your promise?

BLUDGEON. That I will, miss. [*Burst of candour.*] You don't suppose I want to face a little wild-cat like you again, do you? Not likely!

DOLLY. Then you may come out. Quietly now. [*She backs a little and stands by the wicker chair, pointing revolver at him as he slowly emerges.*]

BLUDGEON [*meekly*]. Would you mind not pointing it at me while I come out, miss? It makes me nervous. You don't know how easily them things go off.

DOLLY. I'll be careful.

BLUDGEON [*entreating*]. To oblige me, miss.

DOLLY. Very well. [*Lowers muzzle.*]

BLUDGEON [*gratefully*]. There's a good young lady. [*Crawls slowly from his hiding-place and sinks on to chair by bedside with a sigh of relief.*] Oof!

[*Mops his brow with red handkerchief.*]

DOLLY [*after a pause during which she surveys him critically*]. And now you'd better go.

BLUDGEON [*submissively*]. In a minute, miss. May I rest a little before I start? I'm trembling all over still.



## *The Burglar who Failed*

DOLLY. Just for a minute, then. But you mustn't stay long.

BLUDGEON. No, miss.

*[Removes great shock of red wig and wipes perspiration from his head, which is small and sparsely furnished with thin black hair.]*

DOLLY. Why you're wearing a wig! Is your beard false, too?

BLUDGEON. Yes, miss.

DOLLY. What fun! Do take it off.

*[He takes it off.]*

*[She bursts into a merry laugh].* How queer you look like that, with your great big nose and your little, little head!

BLUDGEON *[hurt]*. It's not my nose, miss.

*[Takes it off and sits revealed as a seedy, pallid little pug-nosed person of the meekest type.]*

DOLLY *[laughing more]*. Oh, you are funny!

BLUDGEON *[alarmed]*. Sh! Sh! Some one will hear.

DOLLY *[subduing her laughter]*. But why do you dress up like that? Is it to disguise yourself?

BLUDGEON. Well, if you are to be a burglar, miss, you must look like a burglar, mustn't you? And I'm unfortunate in that respect. I haven't the appearance for it and that's a fact. No one would believe in me if I didn't wear these. *[Points to wig and beard, then stuffs them into pocket. Complainingly.]* It's a great handicap for a man in my profession. That's why I call myself Bill Bludgeon, miss. It frightens people. And that's what a burglar wants.

DOLLY. Isn't Bill Bludgeon your real name?

## *The Burglar who Failed*

BLUDGEON. No, miss. My real name is William Simpkins.

DOLLY. I sec. [*Pause.*] How long have you been a burglar ?

BLUDGEON. Not long, miss. [*Sneezes dolefully.*] Only six weeks. Excuse me, miss.

DOLLY [*concerned*]. I'm afraid you've got a dreadful cold.

BLUDGEON. So would you, miss, if you'd been lying under that bed for the best part of an hour. [*Shivers.*] Could we have that window shut, miss ? [*Very sorry for himself.*] My chest's not strong.

DOLLY. Of course, if you like. [*Shuts it.*] Did you get in by the window ?

BLUDGEON. I did, miss. Climbed up by the pipe. I meant to have got here earlier, but my watch was wrong. [*Looks at it disparagingly.*

DOLLY [*looking at it as he takes it out*]. Oh ! That's Mrs. Summerville's watch ! You stole it from her dressing-table !

BLUDGEON [*hurriedly putting it back in his pocket*]. Yes, miss. And a wretched watch it is too. If it hadn't been for that watch I shouldn't be here now.

DOLLY. Wouldn't you ?

BLUDGEON. No, miss. I should have been in this room by nine sharp, took all I wanted and been clear away before you'd left the drawing-room. That's what I meant to do. As it was I didn't get here till close on ten. And then you and your ma come up, and if I hadn't switched off the light and been under that bed before you could say knife you'd have nabbed me. I'd only just time. And I've been lying under that bed in that draught

## *The Burglar who Failed*

ever since, hardly daring to breathe. Lucky for me I didn't sneeze before, miss [*cunningly*], wasn't it ?

DOLLY. Why ?

BLUDGEON [*cunningly*]. 'Cos then you'd have been two to one, miss. Is your ma as nippy with a hockey stick as you are ?

DOLLY [*laughing*]. I don't think so.

BLUDGEON. Ah, I wouldn't trust her ! Women aren't what they used to be.

DOLLY. That's just what mother says

BLUDGEON. Does she, miss ? [*Sneezes again.*] I shall die of this cold. I know I shall.

DOLLY. How did you catch it ?

[*Leans against wicker chair, prepared to listen to his story.*]

BLUDGEON. Up at Major McAndrew's, miss. That's a cruel draughty house, that is !

DOLLY. Was it you who broke into Major McAndrew's, too ?

BLUDGEON. It was, miss. And precious glad I was to break out again, I can tell you. What a man ! Perfect savage, I call him ! As soon as he saw me he snatched up a great stick and ran at me like a mad bull. It's a wonder I wasn't killed ! I'd nothing in my hand but a jemmy. And what's a jemmy against a stick ? Simply useless. One gets flurried and then one drops it. As I did just now, miss, when I was under that bed.

DOLLY. Was that the noise I heard ? [BLUDGEON *nods.*] You butter-fingers !

BLUDGEON. Since then I've carried a revolver, just in self-defence. I needed it, too, a week later.

## *The Burglar who Failed*

DOLLY [*horrified*]. Did you kill somebody with it ?

BLUDGEON. Not a man, miss. Only a dog.

DOLLY [*sternly*]. So you shot Binky !

BLUDGEON. Was that his name, miss ? A great bull-dog up at Miss Mallaby's.

DOLLY [*indignantly*]. I think it was horrid of you to shoot Binky. It was cowardly.

BLUDGEON. Cowardly ! Bravest deed I ever done, miss, by a long chalk. It takes nerve to shoot a bull-dog, I can tell you, when he's got his teeth in your leg. You'll very likely shoot your own leg if you're not careful.

DOLLY. Had he his teeth in your leg ? I remember they said his mouth was full of blood when they found him.

BLUDGEON. It was. My blood !

DOLLY. Still I don't think you ought to have shot him. He was such a friendly doggie with people he knew.

BLUDGEON. Then he evidently didn't know me, miss. I tried to make friends with him. I said " Good dog " and " Down, sir," and all the things one does say to a dog one wants to be friendly with, but he wouldn't pay any attention. He just growled and came at me. I simply had to shoot. And, of course, that spoilt my game at the Mallabys for the noise woke everybody. Old Miss Mallaby threw up her window and screamed fit to wake the dead, and I had to run for it.

DOLLY. Poor Miss Mallaby ! You almost frightened her into a fit.

BLUDGEON. She almost frightened me into a fit, rousing the whole neighbourhood like that. Sh !

## *The Burglar who Failed*

What was that ? [*Listens with strained attention.*]  
Nothing. [*Sigh of relief.*]

DOLLY. Well, I think it's very wrong breaking into people's houses at night and making every one uncomfortable.

BLUDGEON [*hurt*]. Do you suppose it's very comfortable for me, miss ? Do I like going about at night with my cold on me, hiding under beds in a thorough draught and being set upon by fierce dogs and savage majors ? You don't seem to think of me. But nobody ever does think about burglars, not with sympathy. That old Major McAndrew with his stick ; he'd have killed me as soon as look at me. So would you, miss, with that revolver. Potted me like a rabbit, you would. Oh, you don't know what a life it is, miss ! The waiting about in gardens under bushes with the rain getting down your neck, and feeling your way in dark rooms when you daren't strike a match, and keep hitting yourself against the furniture. And then the strain on the nerves, miss, listening for a footstep and always imagining you hear one.—I thought I heard one then. No. Nothing.—Yes, it's a nerve-shattering business, miss, burglary is. I've not been the same man since I took to it. And the profits ! Simply miserable. This is the sixth house I've broke into since I began and not a single thing have I got out of them except Mrs. Summerville's watch. And it loses ! If I do strike a good crib there's a dog or some man hears me and I can't stop. And if there isn't a dog or a man, ten to one there's nothing worth taking and the plate's electro. Oh, it's a beastly profession !

## *The Burglar who Failed*

DOLLY. But why did you become a burglar at all if you don't like it ?

BLUDGEON. Well, I was out of a place, miss. And a man must do something for a living, mustn't he ? So I became a burglar. But it was a mistake, miss. I see that now. I'm not cut out for a burglar and that's the fact. I haven't the nerve and I haven't the constitution. [*Despondently*]. I'm a failure at it, that's what I am, an utter failure.

[*Mops eyes with dirty red handkerchief.*]

DOLLY. I believe you're crying ! You mustn't do that. Burglars don't cry, you know.

BLUDGEON. Not if they're successful, miss. But when you're a failure as I am it's different. I shall never succeed as a burglar. I've thought so for some time and now I'm sure of it. [*Dismally.*] I shall have to give it up.

DOLLY. Give it up ?

BLUDGEON. Yes, miss. [*Mopping eyes.*]

DOLLY. I'm so glad ! And I think you're quite right. Nobody ought to be in any profession they don't like, ought they ? And nobody ought to be a burglar at all. It's not a very nice profession, is it ? And you mustn't be despondent because you've failed. Every one fails sometimes, you know. Mother had a cousin who was a company promoter and he failed. But father found him something else to do and he's all right now. Father said company promoting wasn't a very nice profession either.

BLUDGEON [*meekly*]. Did he, miss ?

DOLLY. Yes. And we must find you something else to do. I wonder what it had better be ?



## *The Burglar who Failed*

[*Pause for thought.*] Let me see. Do you know anything about gardening? Mother wants a new gardener, I know.

BLUDGEON. I'm afraid I don't, miss.

DOLLY. That's a pity. [*She ponders for a minute or two, puckering her brows. Then is struck by a brilliant inspiration.*] Why shouldn't you enlist?

BLUDGEON [*horrified disgust*]. Enlist!

DOLLY. Yes. Go into the army and be a soldier.

BLUDGEON. I don't think I'm quite cut out for a soldier, miss. It's hardly the profession for a man who is nervous with firearms. I think I'd rather be a gardener.

DOLLY. But I'm afraid you can't do that if you don't know anything about gardens. You might learn, of course. But mother wants some one at once.

BLUDGEON [*depressed*]. I see, miss.

DOLLY. What were you before you became a burglar?

BLUDGEON. I was a footman, miss.

DOLLY. A footman?

BLUDGEON. Yes, miss. At General Atkinson's up in Kensington.

DOLLY. How very odd! I knew footmen stole sometimes, but I'd no idea they ever became burglars.

BLUDGEON. They don't often, miss.

DOLLY. Why did you give up being a footman?

BLUDGEON. I lost my place, miss.

DOLLY [*gravely*]. Do you mean you were sent away?

BLUDGEON. Yes, miss.

## *The Burglar who Failed*

DOLLY. I hope you didn't steal, Simpkins ?

BLUDGEON. No, miss. Not then.

DOLLY. Then why were you sent away ?

BLUDGEON. It was the drink, miss.

DOLLY [*shocked*]. Simpkins !

BLUDGEON. It was my evening out, miss, and I'd had a drop too much, and when I got back I was rather noisy. The General heard me as I was going upstairs and I was discharged.

DOLLY [*gravely*]. I hope you don't drink now, Simpkins ? Because I couldn't recommend you for a new situation if you weren't sober.

BLUDGEON. Oh no, miss. I'm perfectly sober now. A burglar daren't drink, miss. It's too risky. All burglars who are out of prison are total abstainers. I took the pledge myself as soon as I took to the profession. I believe that's how I got this cold. A drop of spirits might have kept it off.

DOLLY. You must try putting your feet into hot water instead.

BLUDGEON. Very well, miss.

DOLLY. And when your cold's well we must get you a place as footman again. The Smith-Hardings' are wanting a new footman just now. Mrs. Smith-Harding told mother so the other day when she called. I'm sure that would suit you. The Smith-Hardings' are *quite* nice people. You'll like the place, I know.

BLUDGEON. I don't see how I'm to get the place without a character, miss. And I don't think General Atkinson would recommend me.

DOLLY. Never mind. I'll recommend you. And



## *The Burglar who Failed*

mother shall give you a character. I'll speak to her about it to-morrow.

BLUDGEON. Thank you, miss. Sh! What was that? [*Listens with strained attention.*] Wasn't that a door opening?

DOLLY. I didn't hear anything.

BLUDGEON [*listening*]. Now it's closing again. Sh! Who sleeps at the end of the passage?

[*Standing up, straining his ears.*]

DOLLY. Mother.

BLUDGEON [*loud whisper*]. I can hear her foot steps. She's coming here. [*Terrified.*] What am I to do?

DOLLY. Quick! The window. [*Runs and opens it.*] You must go.

BLUDGEON. I can't. It takes time to get out of a window.

DOLLY. You must.

[*Seizes him by arm and drags him forward.*]

BLUDGEON [*hanging back*]. I can't. It takes time, I tell you. If I did it in a hurry I should break my neck.

DOLLY. Hide then! Quick!

BLUDGEON. Where?

DOLLY. Here!

[*Opens wardrobe cupboard. He bolts into it and closes door. DOLLY crosses room swiftly, kicks off slippers, throws dressing-gown on chair, jumps into bed and turns off light. The dressing-gown slips in a heap on to the ground.*]

MRS. MAXWELL [*bursting in nervously, in frightened tone*]. Dolly. [*No answer from DOLLY.*] Dolly! Are you awake, dear?

## *The Burglar who Failed*

[Enter MRS. MAXWELL. *She has not undressed but is in a peignoir or loose tea-gown of some kind, as if she had been reading a novel in her bedroom in an arm-chair. She turns up light.*]

DOLLY [*feigning great sleepiness*]. Yes, mother. Is that you? Do you want anything?

MRS. MAXWELL [*turning up lights*]. I thought I heard voices.

DOLLY [*sleepily*]. Did you, mother?

MRS. MAXWELL. Yes. They seemed to come from here. Have you been asleep?

DOLLY. Not yet, mother. [*Innocently.*] And anyhow I don't talk in my sleep, do I?

MRS. MAXWELL [*anxiously*]. You haven't heard anything?

DOLLY. Heard what, mother dear?

MRS. MAXWELL. People talking. One of them sounded like a man, I thought. Do you think any one can have got into the house? That window——

[*Turning nervously towards it.*]

DOLLY. Mother, don't be fanciful. You've been sitting up thinking about burglars instead of taking off your things and going to bed till you've made yourself quite nervous.

MRS. MAXWELL. Yes, I am nervous to-night somehow. It's foolish, I suppose. But with your father away . . . Do you mind if I sit with you for a little dear? I'd rather not go back to my room just yet.

DOLLY [*yawning elaborately*]. All right, mother if you don't stay too long. I'm dreadfully sleepy.

MRS. MAXWELL. Thank you, dear. [*Sitting on bed. Sees dressing-gown on floor; remonstrating.*] Dolly!

## *The Burglar who Failed*

DOLLY [*startled*]. What is it, mother ?

MRS. MAXWELL. Your dressing-gown. It's lying on the floor all in a heap.

DOLLY [*relieved*]. Is that all ? [*Closing eyes.*] Just throw it on the bed, there's a good mother.

MRS. MAXWELL [*rising*]. Throw it on the bed ! Certainly not ! [*Picks it up and comes forward.*]

DOLLY. What are you going to do with it ?

MRS. MAXWELL. Hang it up in the wardrobe, of course.

DOLLY [*leaping from her bed, all pretence of sleepiness banished*]. I'll do it, mother.

[*Takes it from her.*]

MRS. MAXWELL. My dear, I can manage.

DOLLY. No, mother, I'd rather. You go and sit down there like a good mother.

[*Puts her into chair by bedside. Then hangs up dressing-gown in wardrobe. There is a momentary glimpse of BLUDGEON as the door opens and shuts.*]

MRS. MAXWELL. Silly child, I never meant you to get up specially. I could have done it quite well.

DOLLY [*laughing*]. Not so well as I did, mother. [*Getting back into bed.*] By the way, mother dear, didn't Mrs. Smith-Harding tell you she was wanting a new footman the other day ?

MRS. MAXWELL. I think she did say something about it.

DOLLY. Well, I've found her one.

MRS. MAXWELL. Have you dear ? Where ?

[*Looking vaguely about as if DOLLY might have left one about the room.*]

DOLLY. Here, in Wimbledon. I met him to-day quite by chance. Wasn't it lucky ? We got into

## *The Burglar who Failed*

conversation and he said he was out of a place and wanted another, so I said I thought I knew of one and I would recommend him.

MRS. MAXWELL. But, my dear child, you know nothing about him.

DOLLY. Oh yes, I do, mother. I know a great deal about him. He was in service for a time and then he took to—other work. But he doesn't like his present employment. It's not regular enough. So he wants to go back to service again. So I said he was to come up to the house to-morrow morning and you'd give him a character.

MRS. MAXWELL. My dear, how can I possibly give a man a character whom I've never even seen?

DOLLY. But you will have seen him to-morrow. That's why I told him to come. I know you'll like him when you do see him. He has such a funny little face. And he's a total abstainer, and you know you like total abstainers. Come, mother, don't make difficulties but say you'll do what I ask.

MRS. MAXWELL [*evasively*]. Well, I'll see what can be done.

DOLLY. That's not enough. You must promise to recommend him to Mrs. Smith-Harding. Mrs. Smith-Harding is sure to take any one you recommend. She thinks no end of you, mother. Promise!

MRS. MAXWELL. Very well. I promise.

DOLLY. That's right. [*Kisses her mother.*] And now you must go back to your room and go to bed. [*Feigning a yawn.*] It's time to go to sleep.

MRS. MAXWELL [*rising*]. Perhaps I'd better.

DOLLY. And you won't be afraid of burglars any

## *The Burglar who Failed*

more, will you ? It's simply absurd to be afraid of burglars. They're much more afraid of you really.

MRS. MAXWELL. Silly child ! [*Kisses her.*] What do you know about burglars ?

DOLLY. More than you think, mother dear. Good-night.

MRS. MAXWELL. Good-night. [*Kisses her.*]

DOLLY. Good-night. [*More sleepily.*]

[*DOLLY puts out light. Exit MRS. MAXWELL. The room is now lit by the moonlight only. A pause. Then DOLLY sits up cautiously and listens. Gets out of bed, goes to door, listens again, opens the door and looks out, closes it, switches on electric light, crosses swiftly and quietly to wardrobe. Opens door. She speaks in a loud whisper.*]

DOLLY. You can come out. It's safe now.

BLUDGEON. Are you sure ? [*Looks cautiously out of wardrobe. Is about to emerge.*] No, here's some one coming. [*Tries to get back. DOLLY drags him out.*]

DOLLY. Nonsense ! Come along. Don't make a noise. [*BLUDGEON emerges from cupboard wiping his brow.*] You must go. [*Goes to window.*] There's no one in sight.

BLUDGEON. Very well, miss.

[*BLUDGEON goes to window, gets on to sill, and cautiously feels with his foot for pipe outside.*]

DOLLY. Be careful where you put your foot. Quietly. Have you found the pipe ?

BLUDGEON [*who is now on window-sill, reaching out with foot*]. Not yet, miss.

DOLLY. Try again.

## *The Burglar who Failed*

BLUDGEON. I think I've got it now, miss.

DOLLY. That's right. And you heard what mother said ?

BLUDGEON. About the place ? Yes, miss.

DOLLY. Very well. Come up to-morrow morning about ten and she'll see you and give you a character. Good-night.

BLUDGEON. Good-night, miss, and thank you ever so much.

*[She nods and smiles. He disappears through window. Pause.]*

DOLLY. Good-night. *[Pause. She leans out looking after him. Speaking off in cautious undertone.]* Are you down ?

BLUDGEON *[off. Loud whisper]*. Yes, miss.

DOLLY. That's right. *[Loud whisper.]* And take care of your cold.

BLUDGEON *[outside]*. Good-night.

DOLLY. Good-night. *[She turns with a sigh of content, and suddenly sees revolver lying half concealed by the cushion of wicker chair. Picks it up.]* Careless man, he's forgotten his revolver !

*[Puts it away in a drawer as curtain falls.]*

*Curtain*

## ESSAYS





## A NOTE ON HAPPY ENDINGS<sup>1</sup>

PEOPLE tell me that these plays "end unhappily." Dramatic critics have even suggested that they do not "end" at all. Well-meaning members of my audiences have even taken pen and ink and written me long letters to show how they could (and should) be improved in this respect. Thus Mr. Jackson's cloth mills should have caught fire, Eustace have performed miracles of heroism in extinguishing them, and Lady Faringford given him the hand of her daughter as a reward. While Verreker, melted by Margery's distress at losing him—"I cannot give you up, Hugh" she was to say passionately—should have gone away to Australia and taken up horse-breeding, thereby "redeeming his past" and rendering himself an eligible suitor for Lady Denison's daughter in the eyes of Mrs. Eversleigh!

I am afraid I am unable to accept either of these as "happy endings." I am far too fond of the Jackson family to rejoice at their cloth mills being burnt down. And I don't believe Margery would be at all satisfactorily mated with an Australian horse-dealer. In fact I demur to the whole con-

<sup>1</sup> This essay originally appeared as a preface to the volume entitled "Three Plays with Happy Endings," which included *The Return of the Prodigal*, *The Charity that Began at Home*, and *The Cassilis Engagement*.

## *A Note on Happy Endings*

ception of a "happy ending" as embodied in these suggested additions to the plays. Theatrical critics and theatrical audiences seem unable to conceive of any other ending to a play save a death or a marriage. But this is a wholly superficial view. "I can survive anything except death," says one of the characters in *A Woman of No Importance*. Had he reflected for a moment he would have withdrawn the exception. Philosophically considered death ends nothing, not even an episode, and we really survive everything. While as for marriage, so far from ending anything it is simply the beginning of a fresh set of complications. All "endings" in fact are purely arbitrary, and my play "endings" are no more arbitrary than any one else's. There is a sense, of course, in which nothing in life ever "ends"—just as there is a sense in which nothing in life ever begins. With earth's first clay they did the last man knead, and, we all of us, like Melchizedek, have neither beginning of days nor end of life. We began ages before our individual birth and shall continue ages after our individual death. We exist forever in our causes and our results. But for practical purposes we find it convenient to assume that things do begin and do end at some particular point, and we divide our lives more or less arbitrarily into a series of episodes of which we say "This one began here" and "That one ended there."

That is what I do with my plays. I select an episode in the life of one of my characters or of a group of characters, when something of importance to their future has to be decided, and I ring up my curtain. Having shown how it was decided and

## *A Note on Happy Endings*

why it was so decided, I ring it down again. The episode is over, and with it the play. The end is "inconclusive" in the sense that it proves nothing. Why should it? It is the dramatist's business to represent life, not to argue about it. It is, however, the "ending" of that particular episode, and, as such, forms a fitting termination for a play.

And if my plays "end" at all they unquestionably "end happily," in this respect comparing extremely favourably with the average conventional comedy, which sends you out of the theatre with a tolerable certainty that half the marriages which the author has so recklessly arranged during its progress will turn out disastrous failures. My plays, on the contrary, leave their characters at the fall of the curtain with a reasonable prospect of happiness in the future. That is the most that life can do for any of us, and the most that can be asked of plays which represent life or try to do so.

Take the plays which make up the present volume. In *The Return of the Prodigal* a young man who has failed at most things and come to the end of his resources takes the desperate step of returning uninvited to the bosom of his family who had fondly hoped they were rid of him for good. So begins the episode of the Prodigal's return. He remains with his family ten days, satisfying a natural craving for food and replenishing his wardrobe. At the end of that time he extorts an allowance from his disgusted father and returns to London to live on it for the remainder of his life. That ends the episode of the Prodigal's return, and no one can pretend that it ends it

## *A Note on Happy Endings*

otherwise than happily for the Prodigal. No more looking about for "jobs" that never come, no more adding up accounts in a filthy Hong-Kong bank or playing steward on a filthier ocean liner. That phase is closed. And it is a "happy ending" for the father too. For it relieves him of all anxiety lest his son should be reduced to cab-running or selling matches on the Embankment, or even dying discreditably of starvation some fine day, as young gentlemen of Eustace's temperament have done before now. That relief is cheaply purchased at two hundred and fifty pounds a year paid quarterly. Indeed some people think too cheaply. The only serious objection I have ever heard to the "happiness" of the ending of the Prodigal is that the allowance is too small. But as this objection was raised by a lady of immense wealth, perhaps her standard of expenditure for a ne'er-do-well was unduly high. And Eustace himself, it will be remembered, only assessed his needs at a modest three hundred.

Moralists will object that the ending is "unhappy" because it is ignoble. That Eustace ought to have "pulled himself together" and "*done* something," and generally have become an entirely different person from what nature and education and environment had made him. But moralists are unreasonable folk. Of course, the sensible and dignified course for the Eustaces of this world is to go away quietly and drown themselves, as Eustace very rightly points out. They are not properly equipped for the struggle for existence in an age of competition. They had better put themselves out

## *A Note on Happy Endings*

of it. That would be the really "happy ending" for all parties. But the moralists won't allow this. Suicide is a wicked and cowardly "shirking of the question." (As if that was not the only thing to do with a question you cannot answer.) It is the paramount duty of every one to go on working at distasteful occupations for inadequate wages, or to live out his life as a pauper, a criminal or a lunatic, rather than end it once and for all in a workmanlike manner with a pill or a revolver. That is your true employers' standpoint. But I am not so sure if the unemployed can be expected to go on agreeing with it for ever. Or the employed either for that matter. However, the moralist is quite certain that Eustace must not destroy himself and the law says that if he does so he is either a madman or a felon. So Eustace, bowing to the measureless stupidity of society since he cannot alter it, accepts the situation and "sponges on the family."

"Mit Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens."

And that is as near a happy ending as you are likely to get in this imperfect world.

The end of *The Charity that Began at Home* is an equally happy one, happier perhaps, for here even the moralist comes by his own. Margery Denison, a romantic idealist with a passion for unselfishness and a burning desire to "help people," gets engaged to an attractive hedonist named Verreker. The two are almost violently unsuited to one another and the marriage, had it taken place, would have been a tragedy. Luckily Verreker has brains enough to realise that passing the remainder of your days with

## *A Note on Happy Endings*

a wife whose moral standard you cannot possibly live up to is a peculiarly reckless piece of stupidity. Moreover, like most hedonists, he does not like either seeing or making other people unhappy. It is one of their more amiable weaknesses. And Margery would certainly have been very thoroughly miserable as his wife before they had been married six months. From every point of view in fact, his and hers alike, the match had better be broken off. So he breaks it off, or rather gets her to do so, and I think it must be admitted that he behaved well. Verreker had no money to speak of and Margery was something of an heiress and a very pretty one. If he had been a callous ruffian he would have married her and spent her money without greatly caring whether she cried her eyes out or not. Being a decent fellow at bottom he would not do this. In the words of Demosthenes he bought not repentance at such a price. And so Margery's life was saved from shipwreck and the play ended happily.

As to *The Cassilis Engagement*, the happiness of its ending is so obvious that it hardly requires demonstration. And yet the dramatic critics as a whole resented it with almost passionate intensity and seemed to think Mrs. Cassilis a wicked, soulless woman who had sundered two young hearts that might have beat as one and set her worldly ambition before her son's welfare. This, of course, is absolute nonsense. Geoffrey Cassilis was a young man of good family and large expectations. One day he was unlucky enough to meet Ethel Borridge in an omnibus and "fall in love" with her. Ethel was a young woman with neither birth nor amiability nor



## *A Note on Happy Endings*

good manners. She had an "impossible" mother and a yet more "impossible" sister. But she was pretty and he was young, and so he proposed to her, and she very naturally accepted him and was glad of the chance. After all, he was an agreeable youth and he would be very well off, and it would be nice to be married to a gentleman, "really married"—a formality which her sister had omitted to go through. Such was the Cassilis Engagement, and had it ended in marriage the marriage would have ended in the Divorce Court, as such marriages always do. The dramatic critics, however, would apparently have faced that prospect with equanimity. Luckily, Mrs. Cassilis, being neither an idiot nor a sentimentalist, took a more common-sense view of the situation. She realised that the stirrings of young blood and the attractions of a pretty face are not an all-sufficient basis for a union that is to last a lifetime; that, so long as marriage is theoretically indissoluble and practically can only be dissolved by a tiresome and ignominious process of law, something more than "falling in love" is advisable in the young people who are about to contract it. "Falling in love," after all, is often merely a euphemism for a purely physical obsession which lasts only till the appetite which prompts it is satisfied. "Marriage," in fact, as Verreker observes in *The Charity that Began at Home*, "isn't a thing to be romantic about. It lasts too long." Still Mrs. Cassilis did not act without due consideration. She surveyed her ground before she began to manœuvre her pieces, and though she must have had the gravest suspicions she took nothing for granted. Ethel *might* be less impossible

## *A Note on Happy Endings*

than she sounded. It *might* be a real romance of hers and Geoffrey's, not a mere sordid entanglement. Ethel should come down to Deynham for a week without prejudice and Mrs. Cassilis would form her own conclusions. She came—with her mother—Mrs. Cassilis made a great point of having the mother—and that was the beginning of the end of the Cassilis Engagement. A pretty young lady amusing herself in congenial surroundings in London is a very different person from the same young lady yawning her head off in uncongenial surroundings in the country ; and Ethel, who could pass muster in Bayswater showed up somewhat badly in Leicestershire. But Mrs. Cassilis gave no sign. The more Ethel fretted and sulked the more resolutely “ kind ” grew her hostess. No wonder Geoffrey thought her the best of mothers and Lady Remenham thought her out of her senses. So the week drew to an end and Ethel went upstairs to pack for their departure. But Mrs. Cassilis gave Mrs. Borridge a warm invitation to stay on—and Mrs. Borridge accepted it. This was too much for Ethel and she threw over Geoffrey, and though he was puzzled and his vanity a little sore I cannot honestly say he was heart-broken. It had been a terrible week, and—well, he supposed it had been a mistake. Anyhow his mother had done everything she could and was the best and the sweetest of women. So the engagement was broken off and any one who does not realise that it was a “ happy ending ” for all parties must be perfectly imbecile. But this is to judge my play as a piece of real life and not as the plot of a comedy, and that is an intellectual feat which seems to be beyond the



## *A Note on Happy Endings*

capacity of the average critic. By him therefore the breaking off of the Cassilis Engagement, instead of being welcomed as matter for rejoicing, was received with mingled tears and curses. Our dramatic critics when they enter a theatre seem to leave all sense of reality outside and judge what they see there by some purely artificial standard which they would never dream of applying to the fortunes of themselves or their friends. To them all engagements are satisfactory and all marriages are made in Heaven, and at the mere thought of wedding bells they dodder like romantic old women in an almshouse. No wonder they have reduced our drama to the last stage of intellectual decrepitude.

My plays "end" then, and they "end happily." But this does not mean that, like other people's plays they are not capable of continuation. I myself once wrote a whole volume of *Dramatic Sequels* in which I provided additional acts for a dozen different plays, from *Hamlet* to *Caste*, from the *Alcestis* of Euripides to *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. If a second edition of that book is ever called for (which seems to me in the last degree unlikely) I shall make a point of adding to it the sequels to the plays in the present volume. Meantime if any one has a curiosity to know the subsequent fortunes of the Jacksons and the Denisons and the Cassilises, here they are in brief:

Eustace Jackson is living in London and we often have luncheon together at the club. He married a lady with a considerable income who is sensible enough never to expect him to be anything different from what he is. So they get on admirably together and he makes her the most amusing and delightful

## *A Note on Happy Endings*

of husbands. In fact they are an exceedingly happy couple, and old Jackson is so delighted that Eustace has at last "done something sensible" that he spontaneously increased his allowance—as soon as he no longer needed it. So Eustace really gets that three hundred a year after all. He is never, I think, likely to become a distinguished man. That requires will and Eustace has only brains. But his book on "How to Fail in Every Profession : By one who has done it" had a certain success among his more intimate friends. Ultimately, I suppose, like all the other people who can write but have nothing to say, he will become a dramatic critic. But I hope not.

Margery Denison is married to Hylton and they have an enormous family. They still continue to "be kind to people" and their *protégés* continue to get themselves and each other into all kinds of hot water. But there is a providence which watches over good people and fools, and they never come to really serious grief. "The souls of the just are in the hands of God."

Geoffrey Cassilis married Mabel to the delight of their respective mothers and of the whole county, and unless they break their necks in the hunting field nothing seems likely to interrupt the even tenor of their happiness. They live down at Deynham in that little house on the edge of the Park the prospect of which so appalled Ethel Borridge, and there is now a little Geoffrey to follow in the footsteps of his fond father. I only hope when he is grown-up and in his turn falls in love with the inevitable chorus girl, his grandmother will be alive to save him from

128

## *A Note on Happy Endings*

the consequences of his folly. For I doubt if she has ever dared to tell Mabel or Geoffrey her secret for dealing with romantic attachments of this kind. Ethel Borridge married Lord Buckfastleigh as soon as he became a widower—and worried that venerable nobleman into his grave in six months. So she also “ended happily.”

CAMPDEN, *September* 1907.



## PURITANISM AND THE ENGLISH STAGE

WHEN the time comes, if it ever does come, when a history of the decline and fall of human stupidity can be written, an interesting chapter of the work will be devoted to the attitude of Puritanism towards the theatre in England. That attitude for more than three hundred years has been one of unrelenting hostility. In the year 1580, says the excellent Dr. Doran, "certain godly citizens and well-disposed gentlemen of London" secured the suppression of all playhouses within the city limits. For a brief period, under the Commonwealth, their descendants actually succeeded in prohibiting dramatic performances in England altogether. But reaction came, as reaction always does, the theatres re-opened, none the better for their chastening if we may judge from the tone of Restoration Comedy, and the Puritan seems to have felt that a change of policy was essential. He could not suppress the theatre permanently by legislative enactment. That had proved to be beyond his strength. But he could at least stay away from it. And he has been staying away ever since.

This was foolish of him. There was something to be said, from the Puritan standpoint, for the policy of suppression—if it could have been enforced.

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

For the policy of boycott there was nothing to be said. It was a piece of mere uncalculating stupidity, for it handed over an instrument which might have made for righteousness to the control of the worldlings. With a little cleverness, a little patience, the Puritan might have captured the playhouse and made it the handmaid of the pulpit. M. Brieux has actually done something of the sort in Paris on more than one occasion. But the Puritan let his opportunity slip, or perhaps his conscience would not allow him to avail himself of it. Anyhow, he determined to boycott the theatre. With the result that the drama which in ancient Athens was a religious observance, which in mediæval England was an instructor in faith and morality, became, in London, a mere entertainment, usually frivolous, often wanton. And such an entertainment it largely remains to this day.

It is difficult to account for such culpable blindness on the part of an otherwise worthy and intelligent section of the community. Here was the theatre one of the devil's strongholds. Their policy should have been to get control of it, and put in a garrison of their own. There would have been no difficulty about it. The theatre is a business like another. It must please its customers or close its doors. Managers have no deep-seated preference for worldly or frivolous playgoers rather than godly playgoers. They will cater for the righteous as readily as for the wicked, so long as they come in sufficient numbers, and pay for their seats. But they will not cater for empty benches. If the Puritan had gone to the theatre instead of staying

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

away from it, the manager would have chosen his plays accordingly. Finding there was a public for religious plays, he would have set about providing religious plays, and the England of to-day would be in possession of a great religious drama. In the theatre, as in other things, demand creates supply. But when the Puritan stayed away from the theatre altogether, irrespective of the character of the play presented, his approval or disapproval became a matter of indifference to the management. It is very gratifying, of course, when you put up a play, to have it praised by the godly for its elevating tendency. But if none of the godly will come to see it your only course is to withdraw it and substitute something to attract the wicked. For the wicked, with all their faults, buy seats. And so the drama, which, like the rest of the arts, is in its essence neither moral nor immoral, neither religious nor irreligious, got a bad name, and when a calling or an art, or an institution gets a bad name it soon begins to deserve it.

Something of the same sort has befallen the English tavern. It is not so very long ago that quite respectable middle-class citizens habitually went to taverns. Such people nowadays would feel that their character was lost if they were seen to enter a public-house. And what has been the effect on the public-house? From being the resort of respectable citizens in quest of modest refreshment it has become a garish, unclean, ill-ventilated drink-shop where the liquor is as inferior as the company. So true is it that you cannot despise a person or an institution without at the same time depraving them.



## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

I have little hope that our modern Puritan, realising the demoralising effect of his attitude upon the public-house, will consent to modify it. But I think it conceivable that, as time goes on, he will modify his attitude towards the theatre. He has, in fact, already done so to a small extent. The absolute boycott of stage plays by even the most "godly citizens and well-disposed gentlemen" of London has nowadays, in the main, disappeared. When it disappears altogether and is replaced by a policy of active encouragement, we shall see a rapid change in the character of our drama. And it will not be a change for the worse.

There is, however, another form of Puritanism whose hostility to the English theatre is of more recent growth. In fact, it scarcely seems to have existed till quite modern times. This is not a Puritanism of faith or morals. Indeed, it is often quite ostentatiously free from either. It is a sort of Puritanism of the intellect, and is not always distinguishable from Priggishness. I remember once asking a well-known man of letters what he thought of a certain play which was then having a considerable success in London. His reply was, "Oh, I never go to the theatre." Do you imagine that he made this confession with a certain diffidence, a hint of deprecation even, as one that might need some apology coming from a literary critic who had written a good deal on Ibsen and the musical glasses? On the contrary. He said it with that curl of the lip, that accent of intense superiority and conscious virtue with which our middle-class citizen tells you that he "never enters a public-house." I have been



## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

somewhat coy about referring to the theatre in literary circles since then, but if ever the subject has arisen—it seldom does—I have usually detected the same curl of the lip.

It was not, of course, on moral or religious grounds that my friend abstained from theatre-going. It was solely because he had come to believe that the plays given in London theatres were intended solely for brainless people, and were, therefore, unworthy of the consideration of a serious student of literature. And, looking at the vast majority of plays which London consents to witness, I cannot pretend that he was wholly wrong. What I resented in his attitude was the clearly implied assumption that the fault lay with the theatre and the managers. Whereas a moment's consideration will show that it lay primarily with himself. The theatre cannot cater for religious people, as we have seen, if the religious people never consent to enter its doors. Neither can it cater for the *intellectuels* if the *intellectuels* persistently stay away. It must cater for the people who go to it and pay for their seats. In London these seem to consist almost exclusively of persons who want to laugh and are not very particular what they laugh at. For a hundred persons who go to *As You Like It*, for one who goes to *The Wild Duck*, ten thousand go to the Empire or *The Girl from A's*. Slowly but relentlessly the English theatre has descended to their level, until for one serious modern drama, for a dozen Shakespearian revivals we have a hundred musical comedies, or comedies whose only excuse would be music. When the intellectual Puritan in London

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

takes to going to the theatre again (as all persons who aspired to serious consideration intellectually did, as a matter of course, a couple of generations ago) we shall have an intellectual drama. Not, I think, till then.

Unhappily, before this can happen something will have to be done to modify, if not entirely suppress, the censorship of plays. I said a few minutes ago that if the religious Puritans had been going to the theatre for the past three centuries instead of staying away, we should have a great religious drama in England, because demand creates supply. I was wrong. The censorship prohibits religious plays in England, and even the law of supply and demand must bow before it. It might have been supposed that what with our religious Puritans and our intellectual Puritans quite sufficient forces were at work to depress and degrade dramatic art in England without paying an official a substantial salary for that purpose. But that does not seem to be the English view. I do not pretend, of course, that this is the deliberate intention of the censorship. It was not the intention of the religious Puritan to foster ribald plays. It is not the intention of the Intellectual Puritan to foster silly plays. But one must judge people by their fruits, and the fruits of these well-intentioned people are the English plays we see to-day.

The censorship of plays was not originally invented in the interests of the unco' guid. It has only been perverted to that use. It was instituted to prevent dramatists from exposing the corruption of Sir Robert Walpole's administration. Its purpose, in

136

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

fact, was political, not moral, and it still, at rare intervals, exerts itself in a political matter. A dozen or more years ago it intervened to secure the alteration of a comic song which was held to be offensive to the late Lord Randolph Churchill. More recently it insisted on changing the title of a play which wounded the susceptibilities of the Sultan of Turkey. But its action in this department has hitherto been tolerably harmless. The main pre-occupation of the censorship to-day is with faith and morals. No modern play dealing with a Biblical subject, or containing Biblical characters, may be publicly performed on the English stage. The censor will not allow it. And there is a large and immensely important department of morals with which the English dramatist may not deal either. The censor will not allow it. The historic attitude of Puritanism towards the stage re-asserts itself here in its baldest and crudest form. The theatre is one of the devil's strongholds. It would be preposterous to permit it to concern itself with serious matters of faith or morality. It would be impious to do so. Let it keep to the things suited to its baseness : fatuous farces, suggestive comedies, suited only to amuse the vulgar or the corrupt.

Who can wonder that the drama, as a serious art form, languishes under such a restriction ? To the English the Bible is the book of books, the storehouse of incidents and characters which have power to stir their deepest emotions, as no other characters or incidents can. The English theatre is not allowed to present them. The English are, at bottom, a solemn people. They enjoy sermons. They like

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

their art with a purpose. Their Prime Minister found time to review *Robert Elsmere*. They themselves found time to read it. The censorship says to the manager: "You shall not present plays of serious moral interest dealing with serious moral problems." During the past few years, among other plays, the censor has refused to license *Ghosts*, by Ibsen, *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*, and *Maternité* (in English) by M. Brioux, and Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Of these, *Ghosts* deals with quite portentous gravity with the visiting of the sins of the fathers upon the children. The two plays of M. Brioux are far more moral and improving than most sermons. *Mrs. Warren* is a courageous statement of a terrible social problem, and has just been pronounced by an American tribunal to be perfectly suitable for public performance, even in the blameless atmosphere of the United States. Yet these and similar plays can only be given in London in a quasi-furtive manner by institutions like the Stage Society in the private theatre of the National Sporting Club!

It is the stupidity of these restrictions that I wish to insist upon. The censorship is not animated with a malignant desire to do all the harm it can. Its intentions are admirable. But the result of its action is, and must be, to degrade contemporary English drama. How can you expect to have a national drama of serious intellectual interest if you cut it off from all the most vital and inspiring subjects? What would have become of painting, of poetry, in England if religion and morality had been forbidden to them as subjects? If Milton had

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

not been allowed to publish *Paradise Lost*, or the National Gallery to exhibit pictures representing the Crucifixion or the Madonna and Child? Happily, painting and poetry have never been subject to such a policy of repression in this country, and the result has been a great school of English painters and English poets. The theatre has been subject to it since the days of Sir Robert Walpole—and the result is the English theatre of to-day. If painting in England had been boycotted by all serious people, and ignored by all intellectual people, if an official had been paid to see that it never dealt with moral or religious subjects, we should not only have had no religious or moral paintings, we should have had no great paintings at all. We should have had not merely no Hogarth, but no Constable and no Turner. Drama, on the contrary, has had to submit to this boycott. The censor has banished the moral and religious element from our stage. And the result is that in London to-day we have five-and-twenty theatres—and no drama. If this is what our godly citizens and intellectual leaders wanted they have certainly achieved it.

Are there no signs of a change in this unhappy state of affairs? I think there are. The religious Puritan, as we have seen, has at least modified his ancient disapproval of play-going. The number of people who consider all theatres as necessarily snares of the Evil One is perceptibly smaller than it once was. Some day it may reach a vanishing point. Again, the Intellectual Puritan, taught by the Stage Society and kindred bodies that there is



## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

a modern drama not unworthy of even his august consideration, is beginning once more to go to the play, as the management of the Court Theatre has been shrewd enough to realise. The censorship, however, remains quite unmoved by this change in contemporary opinion. The ban upon the religious play is rigidly enforced. If *Everyman* had been written by a contemporary dramatist it could not have been performed publicly in London. The censor would have forbidden it. Fortunately it was written before the days of Sir Robert Walpole, and the censor's powers are not retrospective. The ban upon the serious moral play (such as the two by M. Brieux already mentioned) is as stringent as ever. Some people think it is more stringent. The English drama, therefore, finds itself in an *impasse*. On the one side is a growing intellectual and serious public asking for something different from the purely frivolous, or conventional, or silly entertainments of to-day and yesterday, and absenting itself from theatres which do not provide anything else. On the other stands the censorship sternly maintaining an antiquated standpoint towards the theatre, and cutting it off from the sources of serious art. Between the two the modern manager is hard put to it to pay his rent, not to speak of rates and taxes.

It will be said, "Surely Parliament can interfere? A question or two in the House of Commons, a motion for the adjournment of the Debate (by Lord Balcarras), and the thing is done." But this shows an imperfect appreciation of the censor's extremely advantageous position. The censor is not a Government official, responsible to Parliament.

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

He is merely an official in the Lord Chamberlain's Department of His Majesty's Household, like the Poet Laureate or the Grooms of the Great Chamber. The Prime Minister has no say in his appointment. It takes place mysteriously, none knowing how or why. The nature of the qualifications deemed necessary for the post have never been disclosed. The present Examiner of Plays was by profession a bank clerk, and appointed, I believe, because he had "devilled for" his predecessor, the late Mr. Pigott, during his later years. Perhaps the censorship, like the Antonine Empire and the Undershaft cannon business, is recruited by adoption. I do not know. Anyhow, the Examiner of Plays, to give him his official designation, having been appointed in some devious manner, has to read all plays that are to be publicly performed in London, and advise the Lord Chamberlain whether he shall give or withhold his licence for such performance. If that licence is withheld no public performance of that play can be given in Great Britain. Oddly enough, the prohibition does not extend to Ireland, whose faith and morals are left without the censor's protection. More injustice to Ireland! And not only does the refusal of a licence make any public performance of a play impossible, it virtually prevents any private performance either. For London managers deem it more prudent not to let their theatres even for the private performance of an unlicensed play lest they should hurt the Lord Chamberlain's feelings. This is not unmitigated flunkeyism. It is founded upon strictly commercial reasons, though I believe these to be unsound.

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

Managers have a vague fear that though the Lord Chamberlain cannot take formal notice of such private performances, since he has no jurisdiction over them, he might remember the fact against the lessee of the theatre when his licence came up for renewal, which happens once a year. What action he could take is not very apparent. He could scarcely refuse a licence to the theatre on account of a performance of which he had no official cognisance, and which, moreover, was a perfectly legal one. But managers are timid people, and prefer to be on the side of the Powers that Be. The result is that, in practice, no play which may not be publicly performed can, as a matter of fact, be privately performed in any regular London theatre, and thus dramatists are discouraged in the most effectual manner from writing the sort of play which is not admired at the Lord Chamberlain's office. For a play only really exists when it has been acted. Read in cold print it is a mere shadow of itself, like a photograph of a piece of sculpture. The photograph gives you a certain impression of what the statue is like, but you must see it "in the round" really to appreciate it. So, too, if you are to appreciate a drama to the full, you must *see* it, not *read* it. This you cannot do with an unlicensed play in London; at least, at a regular theatre. The most you can hope for is a performance or two before the Stage Society or some kindred body on a private stage. An unlicensed play, be it remembered, is not a licentious play or an immoral play, or a blasphemous play. An unlicensed play, for our present purpose, means



## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

a play dealing with a religious subject or a serious moral problem. And, oddly enough, it is only the serious handling of moral problems that comes under the censor's ban. Flippant, or conventional, or insincere handlings of such subjects have no difficulty in obtaining a licence. Anybody may write a light comedy about adultery and get it produced in London. But a play dealing in a serious manner with the marriage problem would have no chance of securing a licence. And yet we wonder that the intelligent foreigner sneers at the contemporary English drama !

Is there any method of bringing the censorship to reason ? There is ; and, like so many other useful things, it was "made in Germany." The German dramatist of a generation or more ago was hampered by a censorship which threatened to stifle the growth of an intellectual drama in that country as completely as the intellectual drama has been stifled in this.

To combat this censorship a *Freie Bühne*, a "free theatre," that is a society giving performances outside the censor's control, was established, and under its auspices the plays of Hauptmann, Ibsen, and the rest were duly produced, and the fight was won. The Stage Society, in a sense, is a *Freie Bühne*, and it has done valuable work by giving performances of plays which otherwise could never have been seen in London owing to the censor's veto. But the Stage Society has no theatre of its own. It has to hire a stage for its performances ; and, as we have seen, the London manager will not let his theatre for an unlicensed play. Owing to this Maeterlinck's

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

*Monna Vanna* had to be given in a little hall in Archer Street, Bayswater ; *Mrs. Warren's Profession* at the private theatre of the New Lyric Club ; and the two plays of M. Brieux, which I have mentioned, at the King's Hall, Covent Garden. In each case the stage and the auditorium were quite inadequate to the needs of a really satisfactory production and enthusiastic audiences. Still the performances were given, and thereby something was done to show English playgoers that the drama of to-day is not wholly given up to the trivial and the inane. Until, however, a regular theatre, properly equipped, exists in London for the staging of plays of serious intellectual interest, irrespective of whether they conform to the censor's standards or no, the English drama will remain in swaddling clothes. The thing to be done, therefore, is to set to work to build such a theatre without delay.

The enterprise is not really so costly as it sounds. Owning a London theatre in a good position—I do not mean *managing* one—is both a safe and a remunerative investment for your money. The capitalist, or capitalists, who come forward to provide an Art Theatre for London need not part with the building altogether unless they choose. They would, in fact, be well advised to lend it only, in the first instance, for, say, five years. If at the end of that time the experiment had not answered expectations they could resume possession of their property, and let it in the ordinary way to the ordinary commercial manager. Their capital would remain intact. The interest on it, with perhaps a small sum towards working expenses, would be the extent of their

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

contribution. The actual performances would be gladly undertaken by the Stage Society and similar bodies. As a form of philanthropy it would be infinitely more amusing than endowing free libraries, considerably less expensive, and probably less pernicious. If our millionaires had the least touch of imagination, or even the smallest instinct of sportsmanship, they would set about building such a theatre at once. I am told Chicago is building three. And Chicago has no censor to bait.

But it may be asked: "How would the existence of this theatre, this mere building, affect the censorship one way or the other? It would be a private theatre giving private performances only. What difference would it make to the censor's attitude towards public performances at the regular theatres?" It would make this difference, that the attitude of the censorship, which at present is only mischievous, would become ridiculous, and when institutions become openly ridiculous they are either reformed or abolished. The censorship is not ridiculous at present. It does too much harm for that. An institution which can silence a dramatist absolutely in this country, making it impossible for his work to receive adequate production and interpretation, cannot be dismissed as merely absurd. But once build an important theatre in the centre of London where any play of artistic or ethical importance for which a licence was refused could, and would, be produced as a matter of course, and you draw the censor's teeth. He can bark, but he can no longer bite. For a while, no doubt, he would stand out in the old way

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

against "public" performances of such plays, but that would be of small importance when performances technically "private" (in other words, to which admission was by subscription) were being given constantly in a prominent playhouse built expressly for the purpose, and attended by all the most cultivated and intellectual people in London. That is what happened to the *Freie Bühne's* performances in Germany. A year or two of this would make a change in the attitude of the censorship unavoidable. It would be impossible to resist the logic of events indefinitely. And the result would be a loosening of the shackles of the theatre, and, I hope, the growth of a great drama once again in England. Another result would be to restore the habit of theatre-going in a large and intelligent class of the community who have now almost, if not quite, abandoned it; and that would be no bad thing from the standpoint of the ordinary West End manager who has complained so loudly of late years that London has "given up going to the play."

I do not mean, of course, that all the theatres in London would, by the example of the *Freie Bühne*, be at once converted into homes of the higher drama, or, indeed, would ever be so converted. The most I look for in the future is that among the multitude of London playhouses there shall be some one or two which exist for the production of more ambitious, more serious work than it is possible to see at present on the London stage, and that the existence of these one or two "intellectual" theatres should have a leavening influence on those around them to the extent of making their entertain-

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

ments a little less fatuous, a little more intelligent, than they are apt to be to-day. I am very far from looking forward to a future in which solemnity shall be the prevailing note of the English theatre and laughter shall be banished. A play may be a serious work of art and yet remain amusing. Nobody with the smallest sense of humour can see *The Wild Duck*, or *An Enemy of the People*, or *The Three Daughters of M. Dupont* without laughter, and people laugh abundantly at the plays of Mr. Shaw, though he is almost our only "serious dramatist." Yes, the ordinary commercial manager may take heart. The *Freie Bühne*, when it comes, will not drive him into bankruptcy. On the contrary, by recruiting the diminishing ranks of playgoers by a whole new class which at present seldom or never enters a theatre, it will help him to avoid the ruin which at present looms ominously near him at times, if we are to believe the croakers. And as even the most serious and intellectual of us must unbend at times, the more frivolous theatres also will benefit from this accession to the ranks of habitual theatre-goers.

All this golden prospect, however, depends on the reform of the censorship, and the reform of the censorship depends on the building of an Art Theatre. That it will be built I am absolutely certain; but how long London and the English drama will have to wait depends upon the number of people who are willing to work and to make sacrifices for it. Money will have to be collected, unless a single donor, or group of donors, will come forward. But it will be collected in time. With enthusiasm it is possible to get money for most

## *Puritanism and the English Stage*

things in England. The Stage Society, out of its poverty, has actually laid by some hundreds of pounds for this very purpose, so that the nucleus of a building fund already exists. Any one who desires to show his sympathy with that object in a practical way has only to forward his donation to the Honorary Treasurer.

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## MR. BERNARD SHAW AS CRITIC

UNDER the title "Dramatic Opinions and Essays," Mr. Bernard Shaw has lately reprinted a selection from the articles on the English theatre contributed by him to *The Saturday Review* between the years 1894 and 1898. In an "Author's Apology," he confesses that his instinct had been to leave these articles to slumber in the files of that periodical. But every one who reads them in their collected form will rejoice that he resisted it, for they contain some of the most brilliant work he has ever done. And they are much more than merely brilliant. Underlying all their wit and irony you find a sanity of judgment, a prevailing good sense, which brilliant criticism is apt to lack. Occasionally, of course, Mr. Shaw makes a "gallery stroke" or overstates his case to enforce a point. But the total impression left by these two volumes is of a man grappling earnestly and seriously with the problems of the theatre in England, not of a humourist amusing himself and us at its expense. And that impression is very welcome. For it is this note of seriousness, of earnestness, that is so lamentably lacking in the dramatic criticism of to-day. "Weariness of the theatre is the prevailing note of London criticism," says Mr. Shaw in his Apology.

"Only the ablest critics believe that the theatre



## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

is really important : in my time none of them would claim for it as I claimed for it, that it is as important as the Church was in the Middle Ages and much more important than the Church was in London in the years under review. . . . I took the theatre seriously and preached about it instead of merely chronicling its news and alternately petting and snubbing it as a licentious but privileged form of public entertainment. And this I believe is why my sermons gave so little offence."

Mr. Shaw in this shows himself as acute a critic of his own work as he is of the work of others. His dramatic criticisms are sermons. He puts serious truths in a humorous way and lightens his weightiest discourses with a laugh ; but that is merely a trick of style. Look below the surface and you find a moral fervour that is almost portentous. The real Mr. Shaw is not a jester. He is a Boanerges. Listen to this if you doubt it :

"When I saw a stage version of 'The Pilgrim's Progress' announced for production, I shook my head, knowing that Bunyan is far too good a dramatist for our theatre, which has never been resolute enough, even in its lewdness and venality, to win the respect and interest which positive, powerful wickedness always engages, much less the services of men of heroic conviction. Its greatest catch, Shakespeare, wrote for the theatre because, with extraordinary artistic powers, he understood nothing and believed nothing. Thirty-six big plays in five blank verse acts, and (as Mr. Ruskin, I think, once pointed out) not a single hero ! Only

## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

one man in them all who believes in life, enjoys life, thinks life worth living, and has a sincere, un-rhetorical tear dropped over his death-bed, and that man—Falstaff! What a crew they are—these Saturday to Monday athletic stockbroker Orlandos, these villains, fools, clowns, drunkards, cowards, intriguers, fighters, lovers, patriots, hypochondriacs, who mistake themselves (and are mistaken by the author) for philosophers; princes without any sense of public duty, futile pessimists who imagine they are confronting a barren and uncanny world when they are only contemplating their own worthlessness. . . .”

This is not the voice of a jester. It is the voice of Dr. Clifford. Again, of Miss Mary Anderson’s autobiography, he writes :

“ Note how she assumes, this girl who thinks she has been an artist, that the object of going on the stage is to sparkle in the world and that the object of life is happiness ! ”

One can almost hear the thump on the cushion as the preacher utters that sentence. Yet I fancy most people have been in the habit of regarding Mr. Shaw’s attitude towards the theatre as one of flippant tolerance largely tinged with contempt. The republication of these criticisms should serve to correct that impression. One would rather like to hear, by the way, what the “ object of life ” really is from Mr. Shaw’s point of view. Perhaps some day he will write a play about it.

It was then as a driving force rather than as a critic that Mr. Shaw was of most service to the

## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

theatre of the 'nineties. As a critic he had conspicuous weaknesses. His dramatic sympathies were not very wide. He was only really interested in one kind of play, and he was not quite fair to the kind of play that did not interest him. Set him to write on *Magda* or *The Master Builder*, and you could rely on obtaining an acute and well-considered judgment. But with the average romantic drama or the average conventional comedy he was helpless. He had not the temperament which suffers fools gladly, and when he was bored he was merciless. Moreover, as he himself admits, he did not aim at impartiality. "I have never claimed for myself the divine attribute of justice," he says blandly. His articles were "a siege laid to the theatre of the nineteenth century by an author who had to cut his way into it at the point of the pen and throw some of its defenders into the moat." In fact, as he confesses, he constantly accused his opponents of failure because they were not doing what he wanted, whereas they were often succeeding quite brilliantly in doing what they themselves wanted. He set up his own standard of what the drama should be and how it should be presented, and used all his art to make every deviation in aiming at this standard, every recalcitrance in approaching it, every refusal to accept it seem ridiculous and old-fashioned. This is not the ideal attitude for a critic, but it must be admitted that it is one which Mr. Shaw shares with almost every one who writes about the theatre in London at the present time. Our dramatic critics, as a class, are always asking whether the dramatist is doing what *they* want, instead of giving

## Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic

their minds to the only question of any importance critically, namely, whether he has done what *he* wants and done it competently. It is not criticism to denounce *Hedda Gabler* because it is not *Charley's Aunt*. The author of *Hedda Gabler* aimed at the naturalistic presentation of a certain group of characters under the conditions of ordinary life as it is lived to-day. The author of *Charley's Aunt* had a totally different object, namely, to make us laugh. That, and that only. What the critic has to do is to realise what the dramatist's aim has been, and to tell us whether he has hit or missed it, not to scold him because he has not aimed at something else. It is not criticism to "slate" a circus rider because he rides on horseback instead of playing Hamlet, even though the critic is Bernard Shaw. Yet this is what Mr. Shaw came near doing at times, and what his brother critics of to-day are almost always doing.

Another defect of his, closely allied to this, arises from a certain narrowness of sympathy. Mr. Shaw is a reformer and a propagandist. He feels keenly when he feels at all. But he only feels a certain number of things, and everything outside these leaves him cold. "Life is real, life is earnest" with him. He is therefore quite intolerant of the theatre considered merely as entertainment. For him the drama is a criticism of life or it is nothing. He is quite willing that it should amuse, but only so long as it also instructs. This makes him a sympathetic and discerning judge of such plays as those of Hauptmann or Brieux, but rather disqualifies him from dealing with, say, *The Importance of Being Earnest*. Here is his judgment of that play :

## Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic

“I cannot say that I cared greatly for *The Importance of Being Earnest*. It amused me of course ; but unless comedy touches me as well as amuses me it leaves me with a sense of having wasted my evening. I go to the theatre to be moved to laughter, not to be tickled or bustled into it ; and that is why, though I laugh as much as anybody at a farcical comedy, I am out of spirits before the end of the second act, and out of temper before the end of the third, my miserable mechanical laughter intensifying these symptoms at every outburst. If the public ever becomes intelligent enough to know when it is really enjoying itself and when it is not, there will be an end of farcical comedy.”

“Wasted my evening !” That is the true attitude of the serious person towards laughter. Life is the preface to eternity. Every moment dies a man. Oh, let us reflect on this, my brothers ! It is rather splendid to find a wit and a humourist of Mr. Shaw’s brilliancy taking this view, but there is no accounting for the idiosyncrasies of genius. For myself, though I too am a serious person, I am only too grateful when I am amused in the English theatre at all, and my “miserable mechanical laughter” neither gives me moral qualms nor upsets my temper.

The fact is, of course, the contemporary theatre is too various a subject for any one man to treat adequately. Stretching as it does from the musical play, which is practically a music-hall entertainment, at one end, to Ibsen and Maxim Gorki, Shakespeare, and the author of *Everyman* at the other, it is

## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

hopeless to expect any one mind to deal adequately or even fairly with all its manifestations. To ask Mr. Walkley or Mr. Shaw to criticise the average slushy sentimentality, or the average romantic fatuity, or the average musical idiocy, is neither fair to the author nor to the manager. A critic can be too good for his job, just as he can be too bad for it. A wise editor, in fact, would keep a pack of critics, and turn on a different man for different classes of work. Why expect Mr. Archer to be any more successful with the light-hearted productions of Mr. George Edwardes? The wise editor, realising this, will retain a person of advanced sympathies to attend the productions of the Court and the Stage Society, and a comfortable sensible Philistine for those of His Majesty's and the Haymarket. Then everybody would be satisfied, and the criticisms would have some value, being written from the standpoint of the persons whom the pieces were intended to please.

Mr. Shaw, however, would not agree with this view. It would not fit in with his intellectual position as propagandist. If a thing does not go his way he is not content to let it go its own. He must denounce it. Nor does he attach any sentimental importance to critical detachment. On the contrary, I think he actually disapproves of it as a form of indifference. His mission as critic then was to attack or defend, not to estimate. And if the attack was occasionally infuriating to the people who did not happen to agree with it, Mr. Shaw did not mind that. "In this world," he remarks, "if you do not say a thing in an irritating way you may just



## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

as well not say it at all, since nobody will trouble themselves about anything that does not trouble them. The attention given to criticism is in direct proportion to its indigestibility." Mr. Shaw might do worse than prefix that sentence to his forthcoming volume of plays. It would be a valuable guide to his reviewers, and might help them to keep their tempers.

Not the least remarkable thing about these articles is the way in which they have retained their freshness. It is a hazardous thing to republish fifteen-year-old contributions to a weekly paper. They are apt to wear a somewhat faded air after that period. And this is a pity, for it makes one wonder, on re-reading them, whether they ever were so amusing after all. "*Punch* isn't as good as it used to be," said some one to Douglas Jerrold. "My dear fellow," replied Jerrold, "it never was." Mr. Shaw's criticisms, I am glad to say, survive the test of republication triumphantly. Time seems to have left no mark on them. The merit of this is partly, of course, Mr. Shaw's. Bad work could not possibly wear so well. But some of it is due to the subject with which they deal. Collect into a volume a series of old articles on the politics, or literature, or sociology, or painting of the early 'nineties, and they will seem hopelessly musty. The questions they discuss have been settled long since one way or the other, or else they have ceased to interest us. Our point of view has shifted so much since they were written that we can scarcely understand them, far less find them readable. But with the English theatre the case is different. Politics,



## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

sociology, literature, Fine Art, have moved in England during the past fifteen years. New ideas have come in, old ideas have gone out. The English theatre has not moved at all. The plays, the managers, the actors are unchanged. The names are different. Smith has replaced Brown in this capacity or that, but behind the names the realities are unaltered, and Smith is merely Brown over again. At times, of course, some movement seems to be taking place. There is supposed to be one going on at Sloane Square just now. But that is a mere ripple on the surface of contemporary drama. The bulk of our playhouses are quite unaffected by it. It will soon die away, and the English theatre, which seemed to be stirring for a moment uneasily in its sleep, will turn over and doze off again. The London stage of to-day as a whole is the London stage of fifteen years ago, its managers unconverted, its method and policy unchanged. The Court Theatre has just given a few tentative matinees of *Hedda Gabler*. Miss Robins was doing the same fifteen years ago. At the St. James's Mr. Pinero has replaced *Mrs. Tanqueray* with *His House in Order*—not exactly progress. The Stage Society is merely the Independent Theatre in a new incarnation. Musical comedy is still the mainstay of our most successful managements. *Plus ça change plus c'est la même chose*.

And if the plays and the managers are unaltered, so too are the dramatic critics. When the recent *Hedda Gabler* matinees took place I had the curiosity to read the press notices of them. I think I read

## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

all that appeared in any paper of the slightest importance, and there was scarcely one that might not have been transferred unaltered from the papers of fifteen years ago. There were exceptions, of course, but for the majority of the writers time seemed to have stood still during those fifteen years. The Bourbons stand condemned before history because they had learnt nothing and forgotten nothing. Our dramatic critics have bettered this example. They have learnt nothing and forgotten everything. It is not that their criticisms of the play were what is called unfavourable. That would have been of small importance. It is that they were so out of date, so unmarked by any appreciation of the aims and the tendencies of modern dramatic art or of Ibsen's position in the world of letters. Ibsen might have been the merest amateur, the rawest dramatic botcher, to judge by the contemptuous tone with which his play was treated. His critics seemed quite unconscious that they were dealing with the work of the most famous dramatist whom the nineteenth century produced, whose fame is acknowledged in every country in the world, and whose influence on the theatre of to-day dwarfs that of all his contemporaries to insignificance. They seemed equally unconscious of what were the salient characteristics of his art, what were the points on which it broke away from its predecessors and founded a new tradition. One critic (not usually the least intelligent of his tribe) said that *Hedda Gabler* was badly constructed, and proceeded to explain how Ibsen ought to have written it to make it a good play. *Mr. Punch* opined that most

## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

of the dialogue in Act I was unnecessary and wanted cutting. Another writer—this time, I must admit, in one of the obscurer dailies—declared roundly that the characters were wholly theatrical and untrue to life. To read this sort of thing at this time of day in the columns of a responsible newspaper makes one rub one's eyes. What have these gentlemen been doing during these fifteen years? What have they been reading? To say that *Hedda Gabler* is badly constructed is simply to say that you do not know what dramatic construction means. To say that its characters are untrue to life is to put yourself in disagreement with the judgment of educated people all over the world. These are not points on which difference of opinion is any longer possible. The world has made up its mind on them. Its verdict has been given, and it is silly not to realise the fact. It is as if a musical critic of the year 1907, writing of a performance of *The Ring*, should dismiss it contemptuously with the remark that Wagner didn't really know how to write an opera, and that if he wanted to make the Rhine maidens' music worth hearing he ought to have taken a leaf out of Offenbach. The remark about "cutting" the dialogue of Act I is particularly startling after all these years, since every one who has studied Ibsen's technique or even read his plays with ordinary care must realise that "cutting" is what his dialogue will not bear. In Ibsen's plays the dialogue is the action. Not a line is put in that is not material to the characterisation and the elucidation of the plot. There are no purple patches, no speeches inserted for effect. Every word has its place in the scheme

## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

and its vital connection with it. No expert would dream of seriously denying this to-day. The odd thing is that any one who aspires to write about the drama at all should imagine that it is still open to question. As to the essential truth to life of the characters in *Hedda Gabler*, and of all the characters in Ibsen's social dramas, that was, I know, vehemently denied in London fifteen years ago, but surely that, too, is past denying now. Mr. Shaw has several very illuminating passages on this very point :

“The happiest and truest epithet that has yet been applied to the Ibsen drama in this country came from Mr. Clement Scott when he said that Ibsen was “suburban.” That is the whole secret of it. If Mr. Scott had only embraced his discovery instead of quarrelling with it, what a splendid Ibsen critic he would have made ! Suburbanity at present means modern civilisation. The active germinating life in the households of to-day cannot be typified by an aristocratic hero, an ingenuous heroine, a gentleman forger abetted by an Artful Dodger, and a parlour-maid who takes half-sovereigns and kisses from the male visitors. Such interiors exist on the stage—and nowhere else ; therefore the only people who are accustomed to them and at home in them are the dramatic critics. But if you ask me where you can find the Helmer household, the Allmers household, the Solness household, the Rosmer household, and all the other Ibsen households, I reply, ‘Jump out of a train anywhere between Wimbledon and Haslemere ; walk into the first villa you come to ; and there you are ! Indeed, you

160

## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

need not go so far: Hampstead, Maida Vale, or West Kensington will serve your turn. . . .’ Doubtless some of our critics are quite sincere in thinking it a vulgar life, in considering the conversations which men hold with their wives in it improper, in finding its psychology puzzling and unfamiliar, and in forgetting that its bookshelves and its music cabinets are laden with works which did not exist for them, and which are the daily bread of young women educated very differently from the sisters and mothers of their day. No wonder they are not at ease in an atmosphere of ideas and assumptions and attitudes which seem to them bewildering, morbid, affected, extravagant, and altogether incredible as the common currency of suburban life. But Ibsen knows better. His suburban drama is the inevitable outcome of a suburban civilisation (meaning a civilisation which appreciates fresh air); and the true explanation of Hedda Gabler’s vogue is that given by Mr. Grant Allen—‘I take her in to dinner twice a week.’”

Exactly. One takes Hedda Gabler in to dinner twice a week. And one is perpetually meeting—and trying to avoid—that worthy fatuous creature her husband, and that good, tactless, devoted creature his aunt. Old Ekdal, that unconscious humbug his son, Gregers Werle the maddening idealist, Gina, surely the most wifely wife ever put upon the stage, so good, so literal, so absurd, one meets them everywhere. One cannot get away from them. To quote Mr. Shaw again:

“The fact is, we all have to look much nearer

## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

home for the originals of Ibsen's characters than we imagine; and Hjalmar Ekdals are so common nowadays that it is not they but the other people who look singular."

This explains, as Mr. Shaw points out, the almost frantic hostility which Ibsen's plays excited in many worthy people when they were first presented in London. For the Englishman has an ineradicable dislike of facing truth in the theatre—or out of it for that matter. He prefers to "foster the life illusion" on *Liberty Hall*.

"The Master of the Doll's House may endure and even admire himself as long as he is called King Arthur and prodigiously flattered; but to paint a Torvald Helmer for him and leave his conscience and his ever-gnawing secret diffidence to whisper 'Thou art the man,' when he has perhaps outlived the chance of being any other sort of man, must be bitter and dreadful to him."

There is a well-known story of a conversation between Mr. George Meredith and a friend apropos of *The Egoist* which illustrates this point. The friend, while confessing his immense admiration for the book, sorrowfully confessed that he was unable to *like* it—because Sir Willoughby Patterne was so uncomfortably like himself! "Yes," said Mr. Meredith, "Willoughby is all of us." There you have the secret of Anti-Ibsenism in a phrase. Ibsen's characters are "all of us," and as the picture they give is not flattering we declare that it is not like. Mr. Shaw has an interesting note on this point:



## Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic

"I am aware that many of our critical authorities have pointed out how absurdly irrelevant the petty parochial squabbings which stand for public life in Ibsen's prose comedies are to the complex petty parochial squabbings which stand for public greatness of public affairs in our huge cities . . . I affirm that such criticisms are written by men who know as much of political life as I know of navigation. Any person who has helped to 'nurse' an English constituency, local or Parliamentary, and organised the electorate, from the inside, or served for a year on a vestry, or attempted to set on foot a movement for broadening the religious and social life of an English village, will not only vouch for it that *The League of Youth*, *An Enemy of the People*, and *Rosmersholm* are as true to English as they can possibly be to Norwegian society, but will probably offer to supply from his own acquaintance originals for all the public characters in these plays. I took exception to Kroll, because I know Kroll by sight perfectly well (was he not for a long time Chairman of the London School Board ?) . . ."

Before I leave the subject of Ibsen I should like to quote one suggestive passage from Mr. Shaw as to the acting of his work, for my impression is that the failure of our dramatic critics to appreciate Ibsen's plays has partly sprung from certain defects in the early performance of them in London. The English critics as a whole are firmly convinced that Ibsen is a lugubrious dramatist, and that an afternoon at one of his plays is a lugubrious entertainment. Nor can I deny that the original performances



## Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic

of them gave some colour to this view. There was a portentous solemnity about both audiences and actors, a sort of moral fervour, that was both oppressive and slightly ridiculous. It was also quite unjust to the dramatist. Ibsen's plays are not lugubrious at all. On the contrary, no one ever lit up serious themes with such sly touches of irony and humour. *The Wild Duck* is one of the saddest plays that was ever written, but it is also one of the most amusing. It is in a sense a tragedy, and a tragedy of a particularly heartrending kind, but unless it makes you chuckle with delighted appreciation as you see it the performance has been defective. *The Wild Duck* is meant to make you laugh. So is *An Enemy of the People*. So is *Hedda Gabler*. *The League of Youth* is so light a comedy as to be almost a farce. When the Stage Society produced it it "went with a roar." And yet the Stage Society are not what one would call a flippant audience. There is, in fact, no excuse for the dismal solemnity with which Ibsen's plays used to be given (and received) in London, and the recent performances at the Court have shown a welcome determination to banish this. In the 'nineties it was very different, as Mr. Shaw points out :

"The Ibsenite actor marks the speeches which are beyond him by a sudden access of pathetic sentimentality and an intense consciousness of Ibsen's greatness. No doubt this devotional plan lets the earnestness of the representation down less than the sceptical one ; yet its effect is as false as false can be ; and I am sorry to say that it is gradu-

## Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic

ally establishing a funereally unreal tradition which is likely to end in making Ibsen the most portentous of stage bores."

Ibsen's characters (and, in fact, the characters of realistic comedy generally) should be played simply and naturally as they are written, with due appreciation of their humour. The ecstatic method is out of place in dealing with them. It is possible to be too much in earnest in dealing with a masterpiece, as Mr. Shaw notes in the case of the actor in *A Doll's House*, who "struggled with his part like a blacksmith mending a watch." In fact, I am inclined to think that we have never yet seen in London a completely satisfactory performance of *A Doll's House*. We have at rare moments been allowed a discreet laugh at the unconscious egoism and absurdity of Torvald. But we have never been allowed our laugh at the unconscious egoism of Nora. *A Doll's House* has always been played as a sort of Women's Rights tract. Whereas if one reads the text of the famous scene between husband and wife in the last act one finds that Ibsen, here as ever, holds the scales wonderfully even between his characters. His sympathies on the whole may be with Nora against her husband, but his ironic sense of character makes him realise that if Torvald's self-absorption is absurd, Nora's is rather absurd too, and that the *naïveté* with which she reveals it to her husband and to us in the final scene ought not to go without its tribute of laughter from the audience. When the play is given at the Court, as I suppose it will be some day, I hope the

## Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic

management will give this point of view their heedful consideration.

The impatience and hostility which the English dramatic critic of the 'nineties displayed to Ibsen's work finds a curious parallel to-day in their attitude towards the later work of Mr. Shaw. In each case, I suppose, it is the novelty, the breaking away from old methods and conventions, which they find so galling. The Athenians, according to St. Paul, always desired some new thing. The English dramatic critic, on the contrary, is always craving for an old one. "An experienced critic is often as sulky over a new development of the drama as a skilled workman over a new machine or process." The result is a frank detestation of anything like originality either of subject or treatment in the theatre; while any attempt at bringing the drama into closer touch with actuality or with the really important problems of life or conduct excites quite violent reprehension. *Les grands sujets sont défendus*. So that, in deference to critical susceptibilities, our plays as a whole have become purely conventional exercises, as frankly modelled on the plays that have gone before them as a schoolboy's prize poem is modelled on other people's prize poems, and have ceased to bear any relation to life as it is lived to-day. The effect of this remarkable state of things is pointed out by Mr. Shaw:

"Art, fecundated by itself, gains a certain refinement very acceptable to lovers of lap-dogs. The Incas of Peru cultivated their royal race in this way, each Inca marrying his sister. The result was that

166

## Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic

the average Inca was worth about as much as the average fashionable drama, bred carefully from the last pair of fashionable dramas, themselves bred in the same way, with perhaps a cross of novel. But vital art work comes from a cross between art and life."

It is a pity that our critics have this rooted distaste for originality, or, in fact, for ideas of any kind in the theatre, for I do not see how any drama can be expected to get on without ideas. It should be the critic's highest function, in fact, to welcome freshness or courage in a new play and point out its merit to an undiscerning public, whereas in London the public seems often to be more discerning than the critics, and certainly less intolerant of originality or courage. If the public had taken the average dramatic critic's view of *Major Barbara*, or *The Doctor's Dilemma*, or *The Philanderer*, they would have refrained from visiting those plays, and would have flocked tumultuously to *Three Blind Mice*. We know, however, that as a matter of fact they did nothing of the kind. But though all the forces of Fleet Street cannot banish ideas from the theatre altogether, they can and do strangle them when they get there to the best of their ability. "My brethren," said a clergyman in an impassioned peroration, "if you see in the heart of any a spark of grace, water it! Water it!" That is what the dramatic critic does. He waters the spark—and out it goes.

I am inclined to question very seriously the wisdom of the average critic's attitude towards

## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

Mr. Shaw's later work, just as I question very seriously the wisdom of his attitude towards the work of Ibsen. It seems to me to show a curious ignorance of Mr. Shaw's position in the dramatic world of to-day. Mr. Shaw is indisputably the most distinguished living English dramatist. He is, in fact, the only dramatist of world-wide reputation whom we have. His plays are translated into foreign tongues and played in half the capitals of Europe. They are read and discussed and defended and attacked wherever men of letters are gathered together who take any serious interest in the theatre. These are things which it is useless to ignore. The man who has attained a position of this kind must be reckoned with. He cannot be dismissed as negligible or unimportant. The purely parochial success of a two-hundred-night run in a London theatre sinks into insignificance beside a reputation of this kind. The mass of our critics, however, seem quite unconscious of this, and attack Mr. Shaw's new plays, as they appear, with a contemptuous impatience that they would never dream of displaying to those of Mr. Grundy or Captain Marshall. Of course, this does no harm to Mr. Shaw, whose position (like Ibsen's) is not likely to be affected by what Smith or Brown write of him. But I am not sure whether it does any good to the critical reputations of Smith and Brown.

I have devoted most of my attention to Mr. Shaw's observations on Ibsen, because Ibsen remains, now as in the 'nineties, the most interesting figure and the most potent force in the drama of the world. We read and write of him less perhaps, but we feel

168

## Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic

him more. But the criticisms on Shakespeare are equally delightful, though often extraordinarily perverse, while even those dealing with the quite ephemeral productions of the lean years of the 'nineties are full of valuable and suggestive criticism. It is interesting to find, by the way, in these volumes certain passages expounding ideas which the author has since worked up into plays. Thus in an article on *The Colleen Bawn* there is an analysis of the Irish character which we have since enjoyed in greater detail in *John Bull's Other Island*, while a performance of *Henry V* (of all plays) affords the excuse for an onslaught on the profession of medicine which calls to mind certain scenes in *The Doctor's Dilemma*. But indeed the volumes are full of "good things," which the reader must be left to discover for himself in Mr. Shaw's own pages. I will only quote half a dozen of them here as specimens of his quality :

"Mr. Augustin Daly regards art as a quaint and costly ring in the nose of Nature."

"Miss Terry did her duty according to Mr. Jerome's lights—the footlights."

"On the highest plane one does not act, one *is*."

(This sounds dangerously like a justification of the practice of our leading actor-managers—but that is not what Mr. Shaw means.)

"A literary play is a play that the actors have to act, in opposition to the 'acting play,' which acts them."

"The second-class dramatist always begins at the beginning of his play ; the first-rate one begins in



## *Mr. Bernard Shaw as Critic*

the middle ; and the genius—Ibsen for instance—begins at the end.”

“The British Public is slow ; but it is sure. By the time Miss Winifred Fraser is sixty it will discover that she is one of its best actresses ; and then it will expect her to play Juliet until she dies of old age.”

Let me conclude with a characteristic utterance on the painting of G. F. Watts :

“To pretend that the world is like this is to live the heavenly life. It is to lose the whole world and gain one’s own soul. Until you have reached the point of realising what an astonishingly bad bargain that is you cannot doubt the sufficiency of Mr. Watts’ art, provided only your eyes are fine enough to understand its language of line and colour.”

FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW, *June* 1907.



## HOW TO RUN AN ART THEATRE FOR LONDON

*Date obolum Belisario*

FROM time to time various people have come forward with elaborate schemes for the redemption of the British drama. It is not so very long ago that some seventy persons of unquestioned position and intelligence appended their signatures to an eloquent appeal in this very Review calling gods and men to witness that our stage was in a parlous condition, and requires the most serious attention from all lovers of dramatic art. We all attended to the best of our powers—but nothing came of it. Then Mr. William Archer, always earnest, brought forth a scheme marked private and confidential, and hedged about by a fine air of mystery, in which columns of facts and figures were gathered together to prove (what seemed tolerably obvious before) that it was only necessary for some very rich man to put his hand sufficiently deeply into his pocket to start an Art Theatre in London under the happiest auspices. Time passed, but the rich man failed to come forward, and nothing was done. Then there arose a knot of zealots who declared that Parliament ought to furnish a subsidy for the Lyceum to play Shakespeare in perpetual commemoration of Sir

## *How to Run an Art Theatre for London*

Henry Irving. Parliament turned a deaf ear. Lastly, the County Council was urged, in the most moving terms, to allot part of the desert known as the Aldwych building site to the purpose of a Municipal Theatre, to be supported out of the rates.

These schemes one and all seem to me excellent on the artistic side. But on the financial side they do not seem destined to produce much practical result. The seventy persons of light and leading who appended their names to an article in this Review unanimously refrained from subscribing a solitary sixpence to the promotion of the cause they had at heart. One of them, a lady of the very highest rank and fashion, had just been struck off the rolls of the Stage Society rather than face the agonising alternative of paying her overdue subscription. Mr. Archer's millionaire remains resolutely coy about "cashing up," to adopt a vulgar colloquialism. The British Parliament is about as likely to subsidise dramatic art as it is to subsidise the prize ring. Less likely, in fact. And the London County Council has neither the credit nor the cash for such ventures.

It seems, therefore, as if London would have to go without its Art Theatre because nobody is willing to provide the requisite money. It is purely a question of funds. Everything else is abundantly ready, the enthusiasm, the helpful suggestions, the encouraging statistics (Mr. Archer's), even the plays. Mr. Archer compiled quite a list of masterpieces, ancient and modern, which would form the basis of its repertoire. And the Court and the Stage Society, not to speak of a host of other

## *How to Run an Art Theatre for London*

institutions, have been busily adding to their number. Money, however, so far has not been forthcoming. And without money nothing can be done.

I am glad to say I have found a source from which that money can be provided, and in this article I propose to reveal it.

But first of all let me meet a preliminary objection. I shall be told, I know, that it is not really a question of money at all. "You can always get money for anything that is really needed in England," I shall be assured. If money is not to be had, it is because the object for which it is asked is not one which really commends itself to the public. Demand creates supply. If there were a demand, supply would follow automatically. And this is perfectly true as far as it goes. Demand does create supply, in art as in other things. And in the case of the contemporary drama it has created it. For years we have been clamouring for an artistic drama, an intellectual drama, an advanced drama. Well, we have got it. Sloane Square (and the Stage Society) have come to the rescue, and the *intellectual* can wallow in the fine flower of modern dramatic culture, either the home-grown or the imported variety, whenever he chooses to do so. There is only one weak point about the intellectual drama as at present supplied to London. *It does not pay*. It is immensely praised. Cultured people talk about it, write about it, discuss it. Banquets are given in its honour. But nobody buys any seats. From time to time some one gives a series of *matinées* of Ibsen or of Maeterlinck. The theatre is filled in every part with enthusiastic votaries, but the result

## *How to Run an Art Theatre for London*

of the venture, owing to this peculiarity on the part of cultured audiences, is invariably a substantial loss to the management. Independent theatres spring up to cater for their needs, only to disappear again. The Stage Society has kept its head financially above water so far, but no one can say how long it will go on doing so. The Court management, thanks to Mr. Shaw's plays, has hitherto paid its way, but without him I fear its receipts would have been exiguous. Neither Mr. Barker's plays, nor Mr. John Galsworthy's, nor my own, I fear, would have proved strong enough to overcome this idiosyncrasy of the cultured playgoer. And if the cultured playgoer will not support the cultured drama in the only practical way, namely, by paying at the door, how is the cultured theatre to get along?

Commonplace people will say it must be contented not to get along. If cultured people will not pay for their pleasures like uncultured people, they must go without them. If a man will not work, neither shall he eat. If people want a thing, they must pay for it. And so on. But this sort of proverbial philosophy is hopelessly antiquated. Nowadays we know that if a man does not eat, he cannot possibly be expected to have the energy to work, and, therefore, the first thing to be done is to feed the brute. While all really modern social legislation goes on the assumption that people must be supplied with the necessities and the amenities of civilised existence, whether they can pay for them or not. Picture galleries, bands in the parks, parks for the bands, free breakfasts before education, free luncheon after

## *How to Run an Art Theatre for London*

education, free education in between—obviously the step from this to free performances of Ibsen's plays, and Mr. Barker's plays, and my plays, and Mr. Galsworthy's plays is a short one, and cultured audiences are only insisting on their rights when they insist on coming to our plays without paying for the privilege. The problem to be solved is how to enable them to do this without involving the management which produces such plays in bankruptcy.

It is a mistake to imagine, by the way, that this is a new tendency on the part of cultured people. It has always been so all through the history of the theatre. In fact, I believe there never has been a time when people were willing to pay to see artistic plays. Certainly the Athenians were never willing to pay to see Greek tragedies. On the contrary, they had to be paid to go. Two obols was the fee paid to every free citizen for consenting to witness the masterpieces of Attic tragedy, and the *Hippolytus* and the *Troades* (in Mr. Murray's admirable translations) probably brought in more money to the treasury of the Court Theatre than they ever did to that of the theatre of Dionysus. We have not come to paying people to go to the theatre in London yet, though there is no saying how soon we may do so. Already there are signs of a move in that direction, and I see one of our go-ahead American managers is sending a motor-bus to the suburbs to provide free rides to any one who is willing to witness *Brewster's Millions*. Art, in fact, is a thing for which people will not and do not pay, and the English, as a business nation, are quite alive to the

## *How to Run an Art Theatre for London*

advantages of that arrangement. They will pay for food, and for drink, and for fine raiment, for the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eye and the pride of life. But for music or for literature, for fine art or fine drama, they will not pay. Nothing will induce them to. They support the opera because it is a social function where they can display their diamonds and rub shoulders with duchesses. If you are a rich man who buys pictures, do you suppose you will ever pay to visit a picture gallery? Or be expected to pay? Not a bit. The first thing that will happen if you are known to be a buyer and to have ten thousand a year is that a free admission to every exhibition will be sent you. One would imagine that a rich man who was interested in Art would *prefer* to pay to see pictures. He must know that somebody must pay if picture exhibitions are to be kept open at all. One would imagine, therefore, that a mere intimation to him that the exhibition was open, and contained such and such works, would be enough, and that he would hasten to present himself armed with his shilling. But that is not so. And it is the same with playgoers. Rich men don't expect restaurants to provide them with dinners for nothing. But Art is in a different category. And a millionaire or a peecress will sponge for a seat at a play with a relentless ardour that nothing can baffle. That is, if the play has any artistic pretensions. If it is a musical comedy, the case is different. A musical comedy, after all, is merely another name for a display of pretty young ladies in a decent minimum of pretty clothing. And even rich men will pay to see *that*.



## *How to Run an Art Theatre for London*

My conclusion is, therefore, that there is a real demand for an "advanced" and an "intellectual" and a "cultured" drama if only the persons who make the demand are not expected to pay for it. The *intellectuels* will call the tune all right if only somebody else will pay the piper. It only remains to decide who is to do it. And that will be my contribution to the subject under discussion. It is based upon certain observations I have made as to the habits of the cultured playgoer. I have noticed that while that gentleman never dreams of paying for his seat for the plays he affects, this is not due to any niggardly spirit of economy on his part. On the contrary, once secure in the possession of a stall for which he has not paid, no one can be more profuse than he. The whitest expanse of shirt front conceals his chest. His wife puts on the most gorgeous apparel. They drive in state, in a cab or hired brougham, from their villa at Hammersmith or Putney. I have even known them soar to a motor for the evening. They dine amply at a costly restaurant before the play, and sup amply after it. There is usually champagne (hang the expense!). And the total cost of the evening's outing comes to several pounds. "I like an occasional evening at the theatre," says mine host. "But it runs you into a lot of money."

It does. But none of it goes to the theatre, or the dramatist, or the manager, or the actors. It all goes to the fly proprietor and the restaurateur and the *modiste*. But the best of it is the man who does his playgoing on these lines really imagines that he is "supporting the drama," and doing it hand-



## *How to Run an Art Theatre for London*

somely too. He quite believes that this expensive evening of his has been offered up on the shrine of dramatic art.

It was the perception of this which put me on the track of my great discovery. If it were not for the theatre, the cab proprietor would suffer, and the restaurateur, and the dressmaker. Fewer people would hire broughams, fewer people would sup at restaurants, fewer elaborate gowns would adorn fair ladies. Even the chocolate manufacturers would perceive a diminution in their gains, for fewer people would eat bon-bons between the acts. Clearly, therefore, it is to the interest of all these industrious branches of commerce that the theatre, and particularly the artistic and the cultured theatre, should keep open its doors. It is, therefore, their obvious duty (and their interest, which is more important) to subsidise it. Let the restaurant keepers announce on their menus that to every diner at fifteen shillings they will give a stall for *Hedda Gabler*, and to every diner at ten shillings they will give a dress circle seat for *The Return of the Prodigal*, and the problem is solved. The cab proprietors and the dressmakers and the chocolate manufacturers would have to give their support less directly, but each might contribute their mite. In this way we should have an artistic drama which, if not precisely self-supporting, would at least involve no one in financial disaster, and would certainly be a great encouragement to all who wish to see a higher standard of work produced for the English stage.

I wonder whether this is why the Court manage-

## *How to Run an Art Theatre for London*

ment have moved to the Savoy? Can it be that the Vedrenne-Barker *matinées* will in future be financed by the Savoy Hotel as an annexe to their admirable restaurant? If so I congratulate my friend, Mr. Vedrenne, on the financial acumen displayed in such an arrangement, and augur most happily for the future of the enterprise. While this article was in the press news reached me of an experiment at Manchester which bears a most gratifying resemblance to my scheme. This is nothing less than the running of the theatre of the Adelphi Hotel in that city as the home of the Manchester Stage Society. I trust this means that the alliance between catering and the higher drama has already begun. If so, seeing that London is never more than fifty years behind the times in dramatic matters, we may yet live to see the movement spread to us here. What a satisfaction it would be to see the management, say, of His Majesty's taken over by the Carlton Hotel—its obvious destiny—and Mr. Tree set free to devote himself solely to the artistic side of his enterprise, the only side, I am sure, which really interests him!

FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW, *November 1907.*



## THE COLLECTED PLAYS OF OSCAR WILDE

THE complete edition of the works of Oscar Wilde, which Messrs. Methuen are now issuing under the editorship of Mr. Robert Ross, has a special interest for the student of the English drama of the latter part of the nineteenth century. For the first six volumes of it are devoted to the plays, and by their appearance one is now enabled for the first time to consider their author's dramatic work as a whole. Hitherto this has been impossible, since the early plays, *Vera, or the Nihilists* and *The Duchess of Padua*, and also the fragment of *A Florentine Tragedy*—which belongs in style to the early period though it was actually written comparatively late in his career—have never hitherto been either published or publicly performed in this country. *The Duchess of Padua* was originally produced in the United States, and has also been played, in a prose translation, in Germany, and both it and *Vera* have been printed in pirated editions in America and elsewhere. But seeing that the pirated edition of *Vera* was a careless and inaccurate reprint from a prompt copy, and that of *The Duchess of Padua* a prose translation of the German version—Wilde's play is in blank verse—it will be understood that not much help could be got from them by

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

any one who desired to form a critical estimate of the plays, even if he were prepared to go to the trouble and expense of smuggling them.

This unsatisfactory state of things is now at an end. All the plays are now published in an authorised and unmutilated form, and though one cannot pretend that any of the three now printed for the first time are on a level with their author's best work, they have their importance for any one who wishes to understand Wilde as a dramatist and to estimate his powers and his limitations. On the whole, they certainly illustrate the limitations rather than the powers. Mr. Ross, in a characteristic dedicatory letter prefixed to *The Duchess of Padua*, acknowledges with engaging frankness that the play is artistically of small account, and that its author at the end of his life recognised the fact. In doing so, I think Mr. Ross has acted wisely. Honesty is the first essential in an editor, and nothing is to be gained by pretending that bad work is good—especially as in this case the pretence could take nobody in.

There will be some people, perhaps, who will urge that if a play is poor it is hardly worth exhuming after so many years, and that Wilde's reputation can only suffer by its publication. But this, I think, is a mistaken view. Writers of real distinction stand or fall by the best they produced, not by the worst. Byron and Wordsworth wrote plenty of inferior verse, which is duly entombed in the collected editions of their works. But no sane person pretends to think the less of their genius on that account. If *Vera* and *The Duchess of Padua* were far worse plays

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

than they are—*Vera* could hardly be that, by the way—it would still be desirable that they should be published. Wilde is a writer of quite sufficient power and accomplishment to deserve the compliment of a complete edition. Moreover, the early work of great writers has an interest for intelligent people out of all proportion to its intrinsic merit. Ibsen's early plays are frankly bad for the most part and no one can pretend that the actual artistic loss to the world would have been great if they had vanished as completely as the lost plays of Æschylus. But they are interesting for the indications they contain of certain tendencies in his genius, and of the lines on which that genius was to develop, and for this reason the critic would regret their disappearance, though he cannot pretend that there is any particular æsthetic pleasure to be derived from their perusal.

From this point of view, it must be confessed, the early plays of Wilde are less illuminating, for there is far less of Wilde in the early Wilde plays than there is of Ibsen in the early Ibsens. *Lady Inger of Ostråt* is a poor play with an elaborate intrigue constructed on absurd Scribe lines—and not very well constructed. For, whereas Scribe's construction is always clear and workmanlike, *Lady Inger's* is involved and tenebrous. Mysterious strangers pop in and out of dimly-lighted chambers, and nobody, either on the stage or in the auditorium, is allowed to know who they are or what they are about. When the Stage Society performed the play a season or two ago in London only a small fraction of the audience succeeded in disentangling

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

the plot. This is quite remarkable in a play by the man who was to evolve the superb technique of the "social dramas." But though *Lady Inger* is a preposterous play, the eye of faith can see in it something of the Ibsen that was to come. There is an austerity and simplicity in the dialogue, an absence of mere rhetoric for its own sake, and a relative naturalness in the character drawing and the incidents which differentiate it from the work of his predecessors, and herald, faintly but surely, the rising of a new school of drama. Wilde's early work is less prophetic. There are moments in *Vera* and *The Duchess of Padua* when the dialogue or the characterisation gives a foretaste of the later comedies. The talk between the Russian Cabinet Councillors in *Vera* reads rather like a parody of the talk between the men in Lord Darlington's rooms in *Lady Windermere's Fan*, while Padua's Duke is a sort of blank-verse Lord Illingworth. And there is the same faculty for working up an exciting theatrical scene, the same fatal tendency to rely upon rhetoric instead of simplicity in emotional scenes, which made—and marred—the author's plays almost to the end. But except for this, the early drama gives no hint of the later work. The reason, of course, is simple enough. Wilde as a playwright was always an imitator rather than an original artist. In him, in fact, the faculty of imitation was carried to a point that was almost genius. He had an extraordinarily keen sense of literary style. If he had had ambitions in that direction he might have become a literary forger of the first distinction worthy to rank with Chatterton or



## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

Simonides. And, as was natural, this imitative faculty of his had the fullest play in his earliest work. Every artist begins by imitating some one. Even the greatest genius does not spring full-born from the head of Zeus. After a time he "finds himself," and ceases to be an echo, but in the beginning he models himself on others.

The difficulty about Wilde as a playwright was that he never quite got through the imitative phase. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is the nearest approach to absolute originality that he attained. In that play, for the first time, he seemed to be tearing himself away from tradition and to be evolving a dramatic form of his own. Unhappily it was the last play he was to write, and so the promise in it was never fulfilled. Had his career not been cut short at this moment, it is possible that this might have proved the starting-point of a whole series of "Trivial Comedies for Serious People," and that thenceforward Wilde would have definitely discarded the machine-made construction of the Scribe-Sardou theatre which had held him too long, and begun to use the drama as an artist should, for the expression of his own personality, not the manufacture of clever *pastiches*. It would then have become possible to take him seriously as a dramatist. For, paradoxical as it may sound in the case of so merry and light-hearted a play, *The Importance of Being Earnest* is artistically the most serious work that Wilde produced for the theatre. Not only is it by far the most brilliant of his plays considered as literature. It is also the most sincere. With all its absurdity, its psychology is truer, its

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

criticism of life subtler and more profound than that of the other plays. And even in its technique it shows, in certain details, a breaking away from the conventional well-made play of the 'seventies and 'eighties in favour of the looser construction and more naturalistic methods of the newer school.

Consider its "curtains" for a moment and compare them with those of the conventional farce or comedy of their day or of Wilde's other plays. In the other plays Wilde clung tenaciously to the old-fashioned "strong" curtain, and I am bound to say he used it with great cleverness, though the cleverness seems to me deplorably wasted. The curtain of the third act of *Lady Windermere's Fan*, when Mrs. Erlynne suddenly emerges from Lord Darlington's inner room, and Lady Windermere, taking advantage of the confusion, glides from her hiding-place in the window and makes her escape unseen, is theatrically extremely effective. So is that of the third act of *An Ideal Husband*, when Mrs. Chieveley triumphantly carries off Lady Chiltern's letter under the very eyes of Lord Goring, who cannot forcibly stop her because his servant enters at that moment in answer to her ring. It is a purely theatrical device only worthy of a popular melodrama. But it produces the requisite thrill in the theatre. On the analogy of these plays one would expect to find in *The Importance of Being Earnest* the traditional "curtains" of well-made farce, each act ending in what used to be called a "tableau" of comic bewilderment or terror or indignation. Instead of this we have really no "curtains" at all. Acts I and II end in the casual,

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

go-as-you-please fashion of the ultra-naturalistic school. They might be the work of Mr. Granville Barker. Of course, there is nothing really go-as-you-please about them save in form. They are as carefully thought out, as ingenious in the best sense, as the strong "curtain" could possibly be. But this will not appear to the superficial observer, who will probably believe that these acts "end anyhow." Here is the end of Act I:

ALGERNON. Oh, I'm a little anxious about poor Bunbury, that is all.

JACK. If you don't take care, your friend Bunbury will get you into a serious scrape some day.

ALGERNON. I love scrapes. They are the only things that are never serious.

JACK. Oh, that's nonsense, Algy. You never talk anything but nonsense.

ALGERNON. Nobody ever does.

(*Curtain.*)

This may seem an easy, slap-dash method of ending an act, and one which anybody can accomplish, but it is very far from being so easy as it looks. To make it effective in the theatre—and in *The Importance of Being Earnest* it is enormously effective—requires at least as much art as the more elaborate devices of the earlier comedies. Only in this case it is the art which conceals art which is required, not the art which obtrudes it.

In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, in fact, Wilde really invented a new type of play, and that type

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

was the only quite original thing he contributed to the English stage. In form it is farce, but in spirit and in treatment it is comedy. Yet it is not farcical comedy. Farcical comedy is a perfectly well recognised class of drama and a fundamentally different one. There are only two other plays which I can think of which belong to the same type—*Arms and the Man* and *The Philanderer*. *Arms and the Man*, like *The Importance of Being Earnest*, is psychological farce, the farce of ideas. In it Mr. Shaw, like Wilde, has taken the traditional farcical form—the last acts of both plays are quite on traditional lines in their mechanism—and breathed into it a new spirit. Similarly, *The Philanderer* is psychological farce, though here there is less farce and more psychology. Unluckily, the Court performances of this play were marked by a dismal slowness and a portentous solemnity by which its freakish humour and irresponsibility were hidden away out of sight, and its true character completely obscured. Properly played, it would prove, I believe, one of the most amusing and delightful things in Mr. Shaw's theatre.

Having spoken of the most original of Wilde's plays, let me turn now to the least original, to the one in which his imitative faculty finds its fullest expression, *The Duchess of Padua*. *The Duchess of Padua* is a really remarkable example of this faculty. I may add that it is also an extremely amusing one, though the humour is, I suspect, wholly unconscious. It is a tragedy planned on the most ambitious Elizabethan lines, though a certain concession to Mid-Victorian theatrical conventions is made in the

188

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

way of "strong" curtains. In all other ways it follows its models with touching fidelity. Here you have the swelling rhetoric, the gorgeous imagery, the piling up of the agony, of Webster himself. There is the magniloquent verse for the nobles and the homely prose for the populace to which Shakespeare has accustomed us. First and Second Citizen speak with all the traditional imbecility. The croaking raven bellows for revenge. His name in this case is Moranzone. There is a court scene in the manner of *The Merchant of Venice*. In fact, there is everything which one might count on finding in the play of a genuine Elizabethan—except originality. That, unluckily, is absent. *The Duchess of Padua*, in fact, is an exercise, a study in style, not an authentic work of art. Indeed, there are moments when it is not merely a study but something dangerously like a parody. Here is an example. It comes from the opening scene of the fourth act :

MORANZONE. Is the Duke dead ?

SECOND CITIZEN. He has a knife in his heart, which they say is not healthy for any man.

MORANZONE. Who is accused of having killed him ?

SECOND CITIZEN. Why, the prisoner, sir.

MORANZONE. But who is the prisoner ?

SECOND CITIZEN. Why, he that is accused of the Duke's murder.

MORANZONE. I mean, what is his name ?

SECOND CITIZEN. Faith, the same which his god-fathers gave him : what else should it be ?

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

This kind of thing is quite amusing as a skit, but it is a little out of place in a serious tragedy.

And some of the blank verse passages are equally funny, with their elaborate reproduction of the best Elizabethan manner, though here the humour is subtler :

GUIDO. Let me find mercy when I go at night  
And do foul murder.

DUCHESS. Murder did you say ?  
Murder is hungry, and still cries for more,  
And Death, his brother, is not satisfied,  
But walks the house, and will not go away,  
Unless he has a comrade ! Tarry, Death,  
For I will give thee a most faithful lackey  
To travel with thee ! Murder, call no more,  
For thou shalt eat thy fill. There is a storm  
Will break upon this house before the morning  
So horrible, that the white moon already  
Turns grey and sick with terror, the low wind  
Goes moaning round the house, and the high  
stars

Run madly through the vaulted firmament,  
As though the night wept tears of liquid fire  
For what the day shall look upon. O weep  
Thou lamentable heaven ! Weep thy fill !  
Though sorrow like a cataract drench the  
fields,  
And make the earth one bitter lake of tears,  
It would not be enough. [*A peal of thunder.*  
Do you not hear ?



## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

There is artillery in the heavens to-night.  
Vengeance is wakened up, and has unloosed  
His dogs upon the world, and in this matter  
Which lies between us two let him who draws  
The thunder on his head beware the ruin  
Which the forked flame brings after.

GUIDO. Away ! Away !

Would Webster or Cyril Tournour do it differently ? Or any better for that matter ? I think not. *The Duchess of Padua* is a school exercise, a set of Latin verses, as it were, constructed after the best Ovidian models, but it is the exercise of a very exceptional schoolboy. And though all of it is imitative and some of it is absurd, it has from the theatrical standpoint very real merits. It is not great drama in any sense, but it would be very effective on the stage—which, after all, is what plays are meant to be. It has a good harrowing plot, plenty of “thrills,” plenty of declamation, and plenty of impassioned love-making, everything, in fact, which makes for success with the romantic playgoer. The principal characters, too, except the Duke, who is frankly ridiculous, are well drawn after their kind. Not subtly drawn, of course—subtlety would be thrown away in work of this kind—but drawn clearly and boldly. Some of the verse is really fine, and none of it sinks below a respectable level. Altogether, as the work of quite a young man it is creditable enough. If all the blank verse dramas which have graced the English stage during the past ten years had been half as



## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

good, the discerning critic would have had less to complain of.

*The Duchess of Padua*, in fact, is quite good second-rate work. But as soon as you compare it with first-rate work the poverty of its texture at once becomes obvious. Browning, in *A Soul's Tragedy*—I think his best, because his most characteristic and individual play—took a subject belonging to much the same period as *The Duchess of Padua*. His scene also is mediæval Italy where cities groan under the tyranny of their rulers and worldly ecclesiastics pull the strings of government. But where Wilde could only turn out a clever copy of other men's work, Browning produced an entirely original type of drama, which bears in every line the impress of his own personality, which nobody else could have written. It is a real reconstruction of the life of its period as Browning saw it, not as he believed Shakespeare or Webster would have seen it. It has its alternation of blank verse and homely prose, but here too Browning is no mere imitator. He does not simply borrow a trick from the Elizabethans. His first, second and third citizens talk their prose and make their simple jokes in it, but their speeches never for a moment read like a parody of the gravediggers in *Hamlet*. And it is not only the citizens who talk prose. The Papal Legate talks prose too—because he thinks prose. So do the romantic characters, Chiappino and the rest, when they have come down from the romantic heights and have to face a commonplace, practical issue. Browning himself, it will be remembered, divides the play into two parts, "Act I, being what

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

was called the poetry of Chiappino's life, and Act II, its prose," and he writes the first act in verse and the second in prose to carry out the idea. This is to give a fresh significance to the traditional blending of verse and prose in tragedy, and put fresh life into what had become an obsolete convention. If *The Duchess of Padua* had been written with the artistic sincerity of *A Soul's Tragedy*—Wilde, by the way, admired that play very highly—Mr. Ross would not have had to write so deprecatingly of it in his dedicatory letter.

The same imitative quality which prevents one from taking *The Duchess of Padua* seriously as a work of art mars the comedies also. As far as plot and construction are concerned they are frankly modelled on the "well-made play" of their period. Indeed, they were already old-fashioned in technique when they were written. The long soliloquy which opens the third act of *Lady Windermere's Fan* with such appalling staginess, and sends a cold shiver down one's back at each successive revival, was almost equally out of date on the first night. Ibsen had already sent that kind of thing to the right-about for all persons who aspired to serious consideration as dramatists. Luckily the fame of Wilde's comedies does not rest on his plots or his construction. It rests on his gifts of characterisation and of brilliant and effective dialogue. Both these gifts he possessed in a pre-eminent degree, but in both of them one has to recognise grave limitations. His minor characters are generally first-rate, but he never quite succeeded with his full-length figures. He is like an artist who can produce marvellously

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

life-like studies or sketches, but fails when he attempts to elaborate a portrait. Windermere and Lady Windermere, Sir Robert and Lady Chiltern, none of them is really human, none of them quite alive. As for the principal people in *A Woman of No Importance*, Lord Illingworth himself, Mrs. Arbuthnot and her son, Hester Worsley, they are all dolls. The sawdust leaks out of them at every pore. That is the central weakness of the play, that and its preposterous plot. But when you turn to the minor characters, to Lady Hunstanton and Lady Caroline Pontefract and Sir John and the Archdeacon, how admirably they are drawn ! Did anybody ever draw foolish or pompous or domineering old ladies better than Wilde ? Think of Lady Hunstanton's deliciously idiotic reply to poor Miss Worsley when that American young lady, with impassioned fervour, has just been proclaiming to the assembled company the domestic virtues of her countrymen who are "trying to build up something that will last longer than brick or stone." "What is that, dear ?" asks Lady Hunstanton with perfect simplicity. "Ah yes, an Iron Exhibition, is it not, at that place which has the curious name ?" How it sets before us in a flash the whole character of the speaker, her gentleness, her stupidity, her admirable good breeding as contrasted with Miss Worsley's crude provincialism ! Or again, think of that other reply of hers when Mrs. Allonby tells her that in the Hunstanton conservatories there is an orchid that is "as beautiful as the Seven Deadly Sins." "My dear, I hope there is nothing of the kind. I will certainly speak to the gardener."

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

Lady Caroline is equally well drawn, with her sharp tongue and her shrewd masculine common sense. She also has a brief encounter with Miss Worsley, in which the latter is again put to rout, but by quite different means. Lady Hunstanton conquered by sheer gentle futility. Lady Caroline administers a deliberate snub, all the more crushing because it is given with a deadly semblance of unconsciousness. Here is the scene :

HESTER. Lord Henry Weston ! I remember him, Lady Hunstanton. A man with a hideous smile and a hideous past. He is asked everywhere. No dinner-party is complete without him. What of those whose ruin is due to him ? They are outcasts. They are nameless. If you met them in the street you would turn your head away. I don't complain of their punishment. Let all women who have sinned be punished.

LADY HUNSTANTON. My dear young lady !

HESTER. It is right that they should be punished, but don't let them be the only ones to suffer. If a man and a woman have sinned, let them both go forth into the desert to love or loathe each other there. Let them both be branded. Set a mark, if you wish, on each, but don't punish the one and let the other go free. Don't have one law for men and another for women. You are unjust to women in England. And till you count what is a shame in a woman to be an infamy in a man, you will always be unjust, and Right, that pillar of fire, and Wrong, that pillar of cloud, will be made dim to

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

your eyes, or be not seen at all, or if seen, not regarded.

LADY CAROLINE. *Might I, dear Miss Worsley, as you are standing up, ask you for my cotton that is just behind you? Thank you.*

It must be admitted that in order to get this effect, Wilde has exaggerated the rhetoric of Miss Worsley's speech to an unfair degree, thereby "loading the dice" against her in the encounter. But the effect is so admirable in the theatre that one forgives the means.

When I say that it was only in his "minor characters" that Wilde was completely successful, I do not mean unimportant characters, or characters who only make brief appearances in his plays, such as the walking ladies and gentlemen in his evening parties, or the impassive men-servants who wait upon Lord Goring and Mr. Algernon Moncrieff. I include under the description all the people who are not emotionally of prime importance to the plot. Lady Bracknell and the Duchess of Berwick are very important parts in the plays in which they appear, and Wilde obviously took an immense amount of trouble with them, but they are not emotionally important as Lady Windermere is or Mrs. Erlynne. In that sense they are minor characters. It is in the drawing of such characters that Wilde is seen absolutely at his best. Who can ever forget Lady Bracknell's superb scene with Mr. Worthing in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, when she puts that gentleman through a series of questions as he is "not on her list of eligible

196

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

bachelors, though she has the same list as the dear Duchess of Bolton " ? Who can forget the inimitable speech in which she sums up the sorrows of the modern landowner ?

" What between the duties expected of one during one's lifetime, and the duties exacted from one after one's death, land has ceased to be either a profit or a pleasure. It gives one position, and prevents one from keeping it up. That is all that can be said about land."

Yes, Lady Bracknell is an immortal creation. She is in some ways the greatest achievement of the Wilde theatre, the fine flower of his genius. It is impossible to read any of her scenes—indeed, it is impossible to read almost any scene whatever in *The Importance of Being Earnest*—without recognising that for brilliancy of wit this play may fairly be ranked with the very greatest of English comedies. But though Lady Bracknell is wonderfully drawn, she is not profoundly drawn. As a character in so very light a comedy, there is, of course, no reason why she should be. I merely mention the fact lest she should be claimed as an exception to the statement that Wilde's more elaborate portraits are all failures. Lady Bracknell is brilliantly done, but she is a brilliant surface only. She has no depth and no subtlety. Wilde has seen her with absolute clearness, but he has seen her, as it were, in two dimensions only, not in the round. That is the weak point of all Wilde's character drawing. It lacks solidity. No one can hit off people's external manifestations, their whims and mannerisms, their



## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

social insincerities, more vividly or more agreeably than he. But he never shows you their souls. And when it is necessary that he should do so, if you are really to understand and to sympathise with them, as it is in the case of Mrs. Arbuthnot, for example, or Lady Chiltern, he fails.

Why he failed I do not know. Possibly it was from mere indolence, because he was not sufficiently interested. Possibly he could not have succeeded if he had tried. To analyse character to the depths requires imaginative sympathy of a very special kind, and I am not sure whether Wilde possessed this, or at least possessed it in the requisite degree of intensity. He had a quick eye for the foibles of mankind and a rough working hypothesis as to their passions and weaknesses. Beyond that he does not seem to me to have gone, and I doubt whether it ever occurred to him to examine the springs of action of even his most important characters with any thoroughness. So long as what they did and the reasons assigned for their doing it would pass muster in the average English theatre with the average English audience, he was content. That is not the spirit in which the great characters of dramatic literature have been conceived.

The fact is, Wilde despised the theatre. He was a born dramatist in the sense that he was naturally equipped with certain very valuable gifts for writing for the stage. But he was not a dramatist from conviction in the sense that Ibsen was or that Mr. Shaw is. Ibsen wrote plays, not because play-writing seemed a particularly promising or remunerative

198



## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

tive calling in the Norway of his day. It did not. He wrote plays because the dramatic form irresistibly attracted him. Mr. Shaw writes plays because he believes in the stage as an influence, as the most powerful and the most far-reaching of pulpits. Wilde's attitude towards the theatre was utterly different from either of these. He wrote plays frankly for the market and because play-writing was lucrative. Of course, he put a certain amount of himself into them. No artist can help doing that. But no artist of Wilde's power and originality ever did it less. His plays were frankly manufactured to meet a demand and to earn money. There is, of course, no reason why an artist should not work for money. Indeed, all artists do so more or less. They have to live like their neighbours. Unhappily, Wilde wanted a great deal of money, and he wanted it quickly. He loved luxury, and luxury cannot be had for nothing. And if an artist wants a large income and wants it at once, he generally has to condescend a good deal to get it. Wilde condescended. He looked around him at the kind of stuff which other playwrights were making money by, examined it with contemptuous acumen, saw how it was done—and went and did likewise. The only one of his plays which seems to me to be written with conviction, because he had something to express and because the dramatic form seemed to him the right one in which to express it, is *Salome*—and *Salome* was not written for the theatre. When Wilde wrote it he had no idea of its ever being acted. But when Madame Bernhardt one day asked him in jest why he had never written her a play, he replied,

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

equally in jest, "I have," and sent her *Salome*. She read it, and, as we know, would have produced it in London if the Censor of Plays had not intervened. But when Wilde wrote it, it was not with a view to its ever being performed, and so his genius had free scope. He was writing to please himself, not to please a manager, and the result is that *Salome* is his best play. *The Importance of Being Earnest* is written with conviction, in a sense. That is to say, it is the expression of the author's own temperament and his attitude towards life, not an insincere re-statement of conventional theatrical ideas. But *The Importance of Being Earnest* is only a joke, though an amazingly brilliant one, and Wilde seems to have looked upon it with the same amused contempt with which he looked on its predecessors. Perhaps he did not realise how good it was. At least he treated it with scant respect, for the original script was in four acts, and these were boiled down into three and the loose ends joined up in perfunctory fashion for purposes of representation. I wonder whether there is any copy of that four-act version still in existence, by the way? It is just possible that a copy is to be found at the Lord Chamberlain's office, for it may have been submitted for license in its original form. If so, I hope Mr. Ross will obtain permission to copy it with a view to its publication. If the deleted act is half as delightful as the three that survive, every playgoer will long to read it. But that a man of Wilde's theatrical skill and experience should have written a play which required this drastic "cutting"—or should have allowed it to be so cut if it did not

200

## *The Collected Plays of Oscar Wilde*

require it—is an eloquent proof of his contempt for play-writing as an art.

Yes, Wilde despised the drama, and the drama avenged itself. With his gifts for dialogue and characterisation, his very remarkable “sense of the theatre,” he might have been a great dramatist if he had been willing to take his art seriously. But he was not willing. The result was that in the age of Ibsen and of Hauptmann, of Strindberg and Brieux, he was content to construct like Sardou and think like Dumas *filis*. Had there been a National Theatre in this country in his day, or any theatre of dignity and influence to which a dramatist might look to produce plays for their artistic value, not solely for their value in the box office, Wilde might, I believe, have done really fine work for it. But there was not. And Wilde loved glitter and success. It would not have amused him to write “uncommercial” masterpieces to be produced for half a dozen *matinées* at a Boxers’ Hall. His ambition—if he can be said to have had any “ambition” at all where the theatre was concerned—did not lie in that direction. So he took the stage as he found it, and wrote “pot-boilers.” It is not the least of the crimes of the English theatre of the end of the nineteenth century that it could find nothing to do with a fine talent such as Wilde’s save to degrade and waste it.

FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW, *May* 1908



## THE NEED FOR AN ENDOWED THEATRE IN LONDON

From time to time a cry is raised in the dramatic wilderness of London for some one theatre that shall be managed in the interests of art, not in the interests of gain. Sometimes it is called a "National" theatre, sometimes a "Municipal" theatre, sometimes a "Repertory" or an "Art" theatre. Just at present it seems to be called a "Shakespeare" theatre. But by whatever name it is called, we are assured that without a theatre of the kind the England of to-day cannot hope to produce a drama worthy to rank with the work she is producing in the other departments of literature and art.

There are, I know, some people, including not a few dramatic critics, who do not hold this view, who declare, on the contrary, that the British drama is getting on quite well as it is, and, therefore, cannot possibly need either this or any other nostrum to help it. I envy these people their optimism, but I confess when I look round at the staple fare of the London theatres I am unable to share it. A glance at the advertisement columns of the daily papers during the past twelve months will show that that fare has consisted in the main either of musical comedies or of importations from America or of adapted French farces or of adapted English novels.

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

Now, these may all be excellent things in their way. We all love musical comedies, and American plays may be quite as good as English ones (though they seldom are). There is no reason why French farces should not be adapted, and if Shakespeare dramatised novels, why should not Snooks? Only it cannot be pretended that the filling of the London theatres with these and similar entertainments is evidence of any great fertility on the part of contemporary English dramatists.

But it is unnecessary to turn to the records of the advertisement columns of the daily Press to discover the bareness of the dramatic cupboard. Our managers themselves openly and sorrowfully confess it. They would gladly produce new plays by English dramatists, they assure us, only there are no plays and no dramatists. They read reams of manuscripts, they seek diligently, but they can find nothing. The dramatised English novel is the nearest approach they can achieve to an original English play, and that is often an unsatisfactory one.

It certainly *is*. In fact, the average dramatised version of an English novel during the past few years in London gives one a gloomier impression of the condition of the contemporary theatre than almost anything else that can be put in evidence. For if one examines these, one notices that the novel has invariably undergone a marked deterioration in the process of adapting it for the stage. The original story has often been a work of some artistic merit. In almost all cases it has been written with sufficient skill and sincerity to win the approval of the reviewers. The author has put his best work

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

into it, the plot is fairly constructed, the characterisation consistent, the ending such as reasonable probability and consistency demanded. It may not have been a great masterpiece, but the author had no cause to blush for it.

But what of the dramatised version? What, indeed! Plot, incidents, situations, everything has been altered, vulgarised to suit the supposed exigencies of the contemporary theatre. The story has been mangled, the characterisation (if any remains) blurred and distorted. A "happy ending"—in other words an unhappy marriage—has been provided for the fall of the curtain. No clap-trap and no inanity has been considered too gross for insertion in the interests of stage effect, no degradation of the story too great as a bid for success in the theatre, even when the author has been his own adapter.

Why is this? Why does a self-respecting writer who would never dream of writing below his standard in his novel condescend so shamelessly the moment he begins to adapt it for the stage? Is there something so corrupting in the atmosphere of the London theatre of to-day that a novelist loses all respect for himself and his work the moment he enters it? Apparently. But if this is so it seems to indicate that there is something gravely wrong with the conditions which prevail in that theatre. For it is not the case in other countries. A French novelist can adapt his novel for the stage without thinking it necessary to vulgarise and spoil it. Why should the English novelist believe himself to be under that necessity? He cannot *like* treating his



## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

work in this way. And the curious thing is that this policy of his does not even achieve the success at which it is aimed. The percentage of bad dramatised versions of novels that have failed recently on the London stage has been high enough to satisfy even me. Neither manager nor author has made a profit out of them. The author has eaten dirt, the manager has lost his money and injured any little artistic reputation he may have possessed—and all for nothing. The public has refused to go to the play, the critics have damned it, and the manager has withdrawn it.

But neither managers nor novelists seem to learn anything from this experience. Both go on in the old way. A new novelist arises, ready to mishandle his work for the stage. A new manager commissions him to do so. A new monstrosity is duly produced and duly fails. And yet there are people who continue to declare that the English theatre is in quite a satisfactory condition, and that neither an endowment nor anything else is needed to stimulate the production of better plays.

There is, however, another class of opponents of a National or an Endowed theatre who take a somewhat different view from this. These people do not pretend to think the present condition of the English drama altogether a healthy one. They only deny that the founding of an endowed theatre would be the way to improve it.

On the contrary, they maintain that such an institution would be actually injurious. All endowments of art, in their opinion, whether by the State or the great, are necessarily demoralising. Art that

206

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

is to be self-respecting must be self-supporting. Doles and subventions weaken its fibre, and, by shielding it from the bracing influences of free and open competition, inevitably foster feeble and anæmic work. This, for some reason or other, they believe to be pre-eminently the case in England, and especially in the English theatre. Other nations, they admit, contrive to have national theatres, and yet to produce a drama of considerable merit. In England such a thing would be impossible. Endowments are "contrary to the genius of the English people"—whatever that may mean. It is private enterprise that has made England great, and it is private enterprise alone that can make English drama great.

To this all one can reply is that it does not seem to be having that effect at present. Competition and the free play of economic forces may be the ideal conditions for drama. They may be the most moral and the most English and generally the most inspiring to contemplate. But they do not seem to be producing great plays. Yet the people who hold this view as to endowments are obviously quite sincere in their contention, and very much in earnest in it; for only the other day, when Sir John Hare, at a banquet given in his honour, ventured to express his approval of the idea of an endowed theatre for this country, he was taken quite sharply to task by a newspaper which devotes a good deal of its space to theatrical matters, and roundly told that his attitude contrasted most unfavourably with that of Sir Charles Wyndham, who had recently written a letter to the Press in the

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

opposite sense. He was informed that there was something quite shocking about the suggestion that our noble British stage should compromise its independence by soliciting or accepting a dole. That "patrons" had always been the destruction of any art with which they had been permitted to meddle, and that Sir John had only to read history to discover the fact.

I am bound to say that my reading of history leads me to the opposite conclusion. There have been good "patrons" and bad "patrons," and the institution of "patronage" has sometimes been galling to the pride of individual artists, and occasionally been bad for their art. But the poems of Virgil seem to show that the existence of a Mæcenas is not incompatible with the production of great poetry, while, more recently, the case of Wagner is evidence that the purse and the favour of a King may be useful in the production of great opera. But there are, of course, innumerable instances to the same effect, and the whole contention that patrons have always, or even usually, been bad for art is too childish to bear examination. To argue from it, therefore, that an endowment would necessarily be bad for the English theatre, and that the drama can only flourish so long as it is "independent," is nonsense. Moreover, it may be pointed out that all this talk of "independence" with regard to art is mere moonshine. Art, and especially dramatic art, never is and never can be "independent" in any real sense. The drama depends, and must always depend, upon its audiences, upon its "patrons" in fact—as our actor-managers are wont

208

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

to style them quite accurately in their speeches on first nights. And the only difference between the commercial theatre and the endowed theatre is that whereas the latter depends for its existence on one patron, the former depends upon many. And even this difference is more apparent than real. In the last resort, it is to the public—that is, to the general mass of its audiences—that all drama must look for recognition, whether it be *Charley's Aunt* or the most ambitious masterpiece that ever played to empty benches. No patron can make a play independent of the public in the last resort. All he can do is to provide the necessary means to enable it to be adequately produced, and so given a chance to show what it is worth. If it is good, the public in time will discover the fact and go to see it. If it is bad they will stay away. In either case their verdict will be the final one. All that the patron can do is to render it possible for that verdict to be given.

But, it will be said, if the public remain the final judges, of what use is the patron? He cannot compel them to like a good work. That is true. But he can give them the opportunity to discover whether they like it or not, and this they cannot do unless the play is produced. Above all, he can give them time to make up their minds about it. At present this is impossible. The fatal thing about the London theatre as it is organised to-day is that plays must succeed *at once*. If they do not, they must be withdrawn. They may have solid qualities which would in time cause their merit to be recognised, which even might ultimately justify

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

their inclusion in the repertory of the nation's dramatic literature, but unless they can achieve an *immediate* success, they must be taken off. Nay, more, unless the manager believes that they are practically sure to achieve that sort of success, they can never be put on. The ordinary commercial manager cannot afford to take risks, and cannot afford to wait. His rent and his rates and taxes and his expenses generally make this impossible. Plays must succeed, and must succeed at once, or they are useless to him. What he has to look for in a play, therefore, is not artistic merit or literary distinction, but a certain "sensational" quality, some one scene or incident which will arrest attention—in vulgar parlance, create a "boom." Good plays may be lacking in this particular "sensational" quality. Bad plays may possess it. In that case the manager, however regretfully, must produce the bad play and reject the good. He is a man of business, and business considerations must prevail.

With an endowed theatre the case is different. Even at an endowed theatre the fate of a play will depend in the end on the verdict of the public, but here it will be on the public's deliberate and considered judgment, not upon its momentary whim. The endowed theatre puts up a play for a few performances. It is not necessary that it should create an immediate *furor* and fill the theatre for a year. All that is required is that it should have a success with the more critical public who form its early audiences. If they like it, the piece goes into the general repertoire and is revived from time to time as that critical approval spreads to wider circles



## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

and the demand for further performances makes itself heard among the general public. This is the only way in which the best work ever can succeed on the stage. Good plays, as a rule, do not make an immediate appeal to large and uncritical audiences. Good art of any kind does not do so. Good plays, especially if they are at all original in technique or in subject matter, begin by appealing to the critical few. If they have any real artistic merit, and are not merely interesting because of their novelty or eccentricity, they will gradually win their way with a wider circle of admirers, until at last even the general public recognises their value, and clamours for admission. But at first, recognition comes, and can only come, from the few.

Such plays cannot be produced in the London theatre of to-day. Managers admit the fact. They are under no illusions as to the quality of their wares. They freely own that the plays they reject are often far better than the plays they accept. But what are they to do? They have their rent to pay and their rates and taxes and their establishment charges. They are practical men, and they cannot produce plays at a loss.

It is to provide a way out of this impasse that I (and Sir John Hare) want a patron for the theatre. Nor is there anything more intrinsically ignoble about a theatre's depending upon one patron than upon many. If Mr. Pinero does not writhe at the thought that *His House in Order* could never have been produced but for the shillings and the half-crowns and the half-guineas of the St. James' audiences, why should I and Sir John be expected

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

to feel uncomfortable because another sort of drama cannot be produced unless Smith or Brown furnishes a hundred thousand or so towards providing a home for it? Indeed, "dependence" upon a single patron may well be less demoralising for the dramatist than "dependence" upon the mass of the playgoing public. For, if the patron be a man of taste and artistic sympathies—nay, if he be merely a man of generous instincts who desires to use some portion of his wealth for the benefit of his kind—his "patronage" may easily be a wholesomer influence on the drama than that of the ordinary rabble of playgoers who demand nothing better from the theatre than a new "sensation," and are quite unmoved by any artistic or altruistic considerations whatsoever.

It may be admitted, then, that the theory that endowments are necessarily injurious to art is a fallacious one. But there may still be people who ask why the theatre in particular should stand in need of an endowment, and why, as is claimed, it stands more in need of endowment to-day than ever before. The other arts contrive to get along in England without endowments. Novelists do not go about saying that there will be no good novels until the State comes to the assistance of the publisher. Nor do poets declare that it is quite impossible to produce good poetry unless you are the Laureate. Quite the contrary. Why should dramatists be in a different case? Briefly, because in no other art is there that necessity for *immediate* success which I have spoken of as essential in the case of a modern play. I dealt with this point at some length a few weeks ago in a letter to *The Times*. I will



## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

here repeat more concisely the facts contained in that letter.

Roughly speaking, on the system that prevails in the ordinary "commercial" theatre in London at present a play must run a hundred nights to full or practically full houses, or the management makes a loss. Let us see what this means. The seating capacity of the average West-end theatre may be reckoned at eight hundred to a thousand people. Taking the lower figure, this means that a play, if it is not to be run at a loss, must attract some eighty thousand people in the first three months of its existence, and that a prudent manager must be able to count on its attracting that number before he decides to put it up. There is, of course, no certainty in theatrical matters. No one can ever be sure whether a play will attract or not. The manager can but limit his risk as far as possible and trust to luck. These figures are, of course, only approximate. Theatres vary considerably in size. Some hold more than the numbers I have stated, some less, and the financial risks of a manager vary also according as his theatre is or is not extravagantly rented. Most theatres are held by their present managers from sub-tenants at a rack-rental out of all proportion either to the rent that goes to the original landlord, or to the sum that would represent a fair return on the cost of the building and the value of the land. But, roughly, it may be said that the above are the conditions under which a manager has to decide whether he shall produce a play or not. This being so, how is it possible for him to produce plays for their artistic qualities? Really good plays,

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

as we have seen, take time to win recognition. Even when they are the work of authors of established reputation they do not attract eighty thousand people to a playhouse in the first three months of their existence. If they are the work of a new author there is not the remotest chance of their doing so. To produce such plays, therefore, in an ordinary West-end theatre on the long-run system would be madness. Let us consider what would happen if the same conditions prevailed in the sister arts. Supposing it were necessary that 80,000 people should pay anything from a shilling to half a guinea for a good novel or a great poem within three months of its publication in order that the publisher should not lose by it, would anybody publish it? If it were necessary that 80,000 people should rush to see a great picture within three months of its being exhibited, unless the gallery were to lose by it, would anybody exhibit it? Of course not. Moreover, a dramatist is in the unfortunate position of being more entirely at the mercy of his public than any poet or painter can ever be. It is just possible to conceive of a poet or a painter so eccentric that he would continue to write or to paint things which he believed to be beautiful even though he knew that his poem could never be published, his picture never be shown. He might console himself with the sombre pleasure of reading his own manuscript in his own garret, and admiring his own canvases in his own studio. The dramatist cannot be so "independent." He cannot write plays for himself alone. Actors, scenery, audiences are all essential to a play, particularly audiences.

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

A play that is not played is still-born. Unless it is acted, and acted in a theatre, it cannot properly be said to exist at all. A play is a kind of synthesis of author, actors, and spectators. It cannot prove its qualities or show what it is worth by being read in a back drawing-room. That is why you can never tell with certainty from reading a play whether it is good or not, why you can never tell even at the final rehearsal. The audience is not there, and the audience must play its part if a play is to be a success.

If, therefore, the conditions of the London theatre of to-day bring it about that good plays cannot hope to get audiences (because they cannot hope to get produced at all), the result must inevitably be that good plays will not be written. This has actually happened to some extent already. And as the facts of the situation become more generally known, it will become so still more until the drama as an art-form dies out in this country altogether.

It is, of course, possible to argue that this won't very much matter. Superior people make altogether too much fuss about "Art" which is really of extremely small importance. One kind of drama for practical purposes is as "good" as another. So long as plays are reasonably entertaining and reasonably decent there is no occasion to bother about anything else. This being so, to talk about the "need" for an endowed theatre or, indeed, for any theatre at all in this country—except, perhaps, a theatre of varieties—is ridiculous. In a sense no doubt this is true. "Need" is a relative term. Strictly speaking, all that a nation "needs" is food

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

and drink and perhaps sanitation. Art of any kind is a luxury merely, and the commonsense person will tell you that he cares not a jot whether your plays are masterpieces like *Macbeth*, or balderdash like —.

If, however, you are prepared to admit that there are other "needs" beyond the purely material ones, then it may be claimed, I think, that even art has its value for a nation, and that if plays are to be written at all, it is better that they should be good plays than shoddy ones. I do not pretend that the "need" for a national theatre is so keenly felt that Englishmen are prepared to die on a barricade for it. But there is a large and, I believe, an increasing number of people who are seriously desirous of seeing such a theatre established. And though I don't know how many votes are to be got by its establishment—the ultimate test of any political measure nowadays—I am not sure whether a Government which gave them what they wanted might not score even politically.

If, however, we are not to get an endowment for the theatre out of the Government, there remains the possibility of getting one from some one or more rich men, and this, I own, seems to me more likely. Indeed, it is a standing source of wonder to me that such a theatre has not been started already. It would be such a very much more interesting hobby than most of those on which millionaires seem to lavish their money at present. It is only the other day that the halfpenny papers were chronicling how one of these gentlemen had spent some thousands of pounds on turning part of a London hotel into a

216

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

wig-wam (or was it a lake ?) for the evening in order to give a dinner-party which should amuse his guests. What a very odd sense of humour he must have had ! Other people spend fortunes on building racing yachts of absurd construction in order that they may be towed across the Atlantic and race under conditions productive of the minimum of sport and the maximum of ill-feeling. The number of wealthy men who have ruined themselves and their friends over keeping racehorses is prodigious. People will finance air-ships and polar excursions and new religions. There is nothing too fatuous or too dull, apparently, for millionaires to spend their money on. The one thing to which it never occurs to them to open their purses is the drama. The only exception I can call to mind in recent times (save the King of Bavaria) is the late Marquess of Anglesey, and his theatrical ambition, unhappily, did not soar above playing principal boy in a pantomime in a diamond cuirass.

I confess I cannot understand it. For, considered merely as a game, the running of a repertory theatre in London (if you did not want to make money out of it) would be enthralling. There is a special and peculiar excitement about being present at the production of a play with which you are connected, whether as author or manager, or merely as "backer" or "patron," which can hardly be exaggerated. The glamour of the enterprise, its extreme flukiness, the utter impossibility of telling, even from the final rehearsal, whether a play will succeed or fail with an audience give it a fascination not to be found in any other branch of sport.

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

Indeed, to the ordinary "commercial" manager the excitement is almost uncomfortably poignant, and a little resembles that of the Suicide Club. For him, burdened with his extravagant mounting and costumes and his oppressive rent and taxes, the failure even of a single play may spell something like ruin. The patron of a repertory theatre is in a more enviable position. He has all the excitement of the commercial manager's venture, but only a fraction of his risk. For he does not want his play to "run." He is not staking his all on the chance of finding a piece that will attract 80,000 people in three months, and spending a preposterous amount of money in scenery and costumes in the vain hope of making it do so. All he wishes to do is to see whether a play which he believes to be good is worth including in his repertory. A quite inexpensive production will suffice to show him this, and if the play fails, no harm has been done. He has always his repertory to fall back upon, and one failure or even a dozen failures hardly affect him. To the ordinary manager two or three successive failures spell bankruptcy.

In a repertory theatre, therefore, entrenched behind its endowments, a man has all the excitement and the interest of ordinary theatrical speculation and none of the anguish. Why does nobody start one? If I were a capitalist I would do it myself to-morrow. Nay, more, if I ever wallow in gold as a result of my plays—which, I am bound to say, does not seem likely—I shall immediately do so. Not only do I believe that such a theatre would be really valuable to dramatic art in this country, but I am quite sure that I should get an enormous

218



## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

amount of amusement out of it. The mere fun of putting up the other fellows' plays and watching them fail would be delightful, and if they succeeded—as they might occasionally—it would be almost equally exhilarating. For it would show that in that particular instance one's judgment had been right, and there are few subtler tributes to human vanity than that. And how the dramatists would wrangle! *Amantium viæ*. Let other successful playwrights buy motor-cars and houses in Portland Place; give me a repertory theatre to make merry with *my* friends. Millionaires may get their pleasure out of turning the Hotel Cecil into a lake; mine shall be got by turning a theatre into a bear-garden.

Hitherto I have only spoken of the value of an endowed theatre to the drama and the dramatist, and have left the managers more or less out of account. But the managers stand to gain at least as much by its foundation, though to judge by their attitude towards the proposal the fact has hardly dawned on them yet. For the condition of the London theatre just at present is by no means a comfortable one, even for the managers, as they themselves frankly admit. A large number of them are losing money and losing it a great deal faster than they like. The only question is, why? "High rents, high rates, high salaries, the competition of the music-halls, the requirements of the County Council," the managers answer, and all these things are against them, no doubt. But these are not the worst evils from which the London theatre is suffering to-day. That evil, I believe, is lack of brains. In Swift's terrible phrase, the theatre is



## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

"dying from the top." Clever men are not writing for it, and clever men are not likely to write for it until the conditions are altered. Mr. Thomas Hardy has written a play lately—*The Dynasts*—but he has been careful to write it in four volumes and some five-and-twenty acts in order to make it quite clear that it is not written for the *theatre*. The list of "Court" playwrights included the name of more than one man of letters of ability, but then the Court management was run to some extent on endowed theatre lines, though unhappily it had no endowment. There is no place for such men in the ordinary commercial theatre. The danger of this utter brainlessness of the theatre of to-day is that educated people will stop going to it altogether from sheer boredom. They will not consent to spend money and endure fatigue in order to see the same old situations indifferently handled in the same old way by playwrights who quite obviously despise both their work and their audiences. That is why it is so unwise of the managers not to support the idea of a national theatre, and that is why it is so unwise of them to support the censorship against the dramatists instead of supporting the dramatists against the censorship. For the censorship, by confining the subjects of plays within certain narrow conventional limits and forbidding dramatists to go outside those limits for newer themes and more unconventional treatment, prevents men of letters who take their art seriously from writing for the stage at all. The managerial policy should be to support everything which promotes interest in the drama or attracts new classes of playgoers to the

## *The Need for an Endowed Theatre*

theatre. The fools will go to the theatre in any circumstances. The problem is to attract the clever people. And though the plays which an endowed theatre would foster would not be the kind of plays which, at present at least, it would pay the ordinary manager to produce, they would undoubtedly create an interest in the theatre in a class which at present never darkens its doors. The Court management actually did this to some extent, though, unluckily, it did not last long enough to produce its full effect. And though these new playgoers would not at first be sufficiently numerous to be worth catering for in the ordinary theatre, their influence would gradually make itself felt even in that sphere. When this happened it might once more become possible to put up even quite intelligent plays at a West-end playhouse without the certainty of bankruptcy.

FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW, *December* 1908



## APPENDICES



## THE TWO MR. WETHERBYS

*Cast of the Original Production before the Stage Society at the  
Imperial Theatre, London, on March 15, 1903.*

RICHARD WETHERBY

Mr. Nye Chart.

CONSTANTIA

Miss Nancy Price.

JAMES WETHERBY

Mr. A. E. George.

MARGARET

Miss Ellen O'Malley.

AUNT CLARA

Miss Henrietta Cowen.

ROBERT CARNE

Mr. Dennis Eadie.

The Play produced by Mr. Charles Rock.

## THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL

*Cast of the Original Production at the Court Theatre, London,  
on September 26, 1905 :*

SAMUEL JACKSON	Mr. J. H. Barnes
MRS. JACKSON	Miss Florence Haydon
HENRY JACKSON	Mr. Dennis Eadie
EUSTACE JACKSON	Mr. A. E. Matthews
VIOLET JACKSON	Miss Amy Lamborn
SIR JOHN FARINGFORD, BART.	Mr. Arthur Applin
LADY FARINGFORD	Miss Hilda Rivers
STELLA FARINGFORD	Miss Hazel Thompson
DOCTOR GLAISHER	Mr. F. W. Permain
THE REV. CYRIL PRATT	Mr. Norman Page
MRS. PRATT	Miss Agnes Thomas
BAINES	Mr. Edmund Gwenn

The Play produced by Mr. H. Granville Barker.



# THE CHARITY THAT BEGAN AT HOME

*Cast of the Original Production at the Court Theatre, London,  
on October 23, 1906 :*

LADY DENISON	Miss Florence Haydon
MARGERY	Miss May Martyn
MRS. EVERSLEIGH	Miss Margaret Murray
MRS. HORROCKS	Miss Lizzie Henderson
MISS TRIGGS	Miss Agnes Thomas
GENERAL BONSOR	Mr. Dennis Eadie
MR. FIRKET	Mr. Edmund Gwenn
HUGH VERREKER	Mr. Ben Webster
BASIL HYLTON	Mr. Berte Thomas
SOAMES	Mr. Eugene Mayeur
WILLIAM	Mr. Norman Page
ANSON	Miss Gertrude Henrique

The Play produced by Mr. H. Granville Barker

## THE CASSILIS ENGAGEMENT

*Cast of the Original Production before the Stage Society at the Imperial  
Theatre, London, on February 10, 1907 :*

MRS. CASSILIS	Miss Evelyn Weeden
LADY MARCHMONT	Miss Gertrude Burnett
THE COUNTESS OF REMENHAM	Miss Florence Haydon
MRS. HERRIES	Miss K. M. Romsey
MRS. BORRIDGE	Miss Clare Greet
LADY MABEL VENNING	Miss Isabel Roland
ETHEL BORRIDGE	Miss Maudi Darrell
THE RECTOR	Mr. F. Morland
MAJOR WARRINGTON	Mr. Sam Sothern
GEOFFREY CASSILIS	Mr. Langhorne Burton
WATSON	Mr. Ralf Hutton
DORSET	Miss Margaret Mackenzie

The Play produced by Miss Madge McIntosh.

## THE CONSTANT LOVER

*Cast of the Original Production at the Royalty Theatre, London,  
under the direction of Messrs. Vedrenne and Eadie, on January 30,  
1912 :*

EVELYN RIVERS

Miss Gladys Cooper

CECIL HARBURTON

Mr. Dennis Eadie

## THE LAST OF THE DE MULLINS

*Cast of the Original Production before the Stage Society at the Haymarket Theatre, London, on December 6, 1908*

HESTER DE MULLIN

Miss Amy Lamborn

MR. BROWN

Mr. Nigel Playfair

JANE DE MULLIN

Miss Adela Meason

MRS. CLOUSTON

Miss McAIMÉE Murray

DR. ROLT

Mr. Ernest Young

HUGO DE MULLIN

Mr. H. A. Saintsbury

ELLEN

Miss Jean Bloomfield

JANET DE MULLIN

Miss Lillah McCarthy

JOHNNY SEAGRAVE

Master Bobbie Andrews

MISS DEANES

Miss Clare Greet

MONTY BULSTEAD

Mr. Vernon Steel

BERTHA ALDENHAM

Miss Jean Harkness

The play produced by Mr. W. Graham Browne.

## THE BURGLAR WHO FAILED

*Cast of the Original Production at the Criterion Theatre, London, on  
October 27, 1908 :*

MRS. MAXWELL

Miss Kate Wingfield

DOLLY

Miss Elfrida Clement

BILL BLUDGEON

Mr. Ferdinand Gottschalk

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